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ENGLISH MEDITATIVE LYRICS

BY

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TO

JOHN DE WITT.

PREFACE

IN the treatise before us we shall purposely confine ourselves to the domain of British or English lyrics, as distinct from American, these latter having already been studied by us in a volume which may be best regarded as a companion of the one now presented.* So broad and rich is this lyric area, even within the specific province of the meditative, that we cannot hope to compass the entire list of representative names, but must content ourselves with a limited portion of it. We must, moreover, be satisfied with brief citations and suggestions, making no attempt whatever at elaborate discussion. Few topics within the sphere of literary study impress us as more inviting and recompensing, especially so to those of contemplative habit, and who feel at home in "that quiet and still air of delightful studies" of which the meditative Milton speaks. This volume will have accomplished its object if by it the reader is enriched and quickened in spirit, and led to seek for further treasure in this open mine of lyric wealth. T. W. H.

Princeton University,
January, 1899.

* *American Meditative Lyrics*, E. B. Treat & Co., New York.

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ENGLISH MEDITATIVE LYRICS

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

Lyric Verse.—Meditative Lyrics

THIS is a form of verse that takes its name from the fact that it was originally sung to the accompaniment of the lyre or harp—poetry and music, in the earlier stages of civilization, being vitally connected. The oldest form of standard verse, as it is, also, the most natural and simple form, it stands, in these respects, as the first of the forms, and even at this late date in the history of criticism asserts its claim to the place of primacy. Less sublime than the epic and the tragic side of dramatic verse, and less graphic and pictorial than comedy, it possesses characteristics of a high order possessed by no one of the other forms, and has a wide and an important area of its own. Here and there are poems, such as Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome," or Tennyson's "Princess," or Byron's "Corsair," that illustrate the possible connection of epic and lyric in English letters. The relation of the lyric and dramatic is closer and more frequently seen in that they are alike early and natural forms, alike comprehensive in their range and function, and have alike to do with the common and most personal experiences of men.

Some of the leading features of the lyric are that it is the most emotional or subjective of all the forms; that the feeling expressed is never represented or imitated, as in the drama, but is always that of the poet himself; and that it may be said to cover a wider area than any other form, there being, indeed, no phase of human experience that it does not express.

Hence it will at once appear how large the province is which lyric verse covers, and how important the service is which it is designed to render in poetry and general literature, dealing, as it does, with all the high themes of human life and destiny. It is preeminently the poetry of the heart.

Its special value may be seen in several particulars. First, in the manner in which it combines thought, feeling, and art in one poetic product. These are the three great elements of excellence in any poem—the intellectual, emotional, and æsthetic; sense, spirit, and structure. The undue presence of any one of them vitiates, to that extent, the integrity of the poem, and reflects as well upon the poetic genius of the author.

Even so able a poet as Browning often so magnifies the intellectual as to impair the value of his verse. Mrs. Browning passes, at times, to the other extreme of the unduly impassioned; while such poets as Pope, Matthew Arnold, and Tennyson sometimes push the principle of artistic finish over the

border line into the province of art for art's sake. To combine these elements in right proportions is a mark of genius, and not the least so in the lyric, where thought and feeling must alike enter and yet feeling be the controlling factor. To make it such, and yet to save the poem from being unduly passionate, is no easy matter. Within the sphere of the religious lyric the violation of this principle is far too often apparent—as seen in modern hymnology, where good sense and poetic taste are so often sacrificed to vapid sentiment. Sacred lyrics, above all, should be characterized by mental equipoise and literary taste, and not so often be composed by those who have a type of religious experience devoid of intelligence and sanity. Within the province of the secular lyric such transgression is often seen. In no species of lyric is this union of the mental and emotional in right adjustment better seen than in that known as the reflective lyric. The very title indicates this union. In George Eliot's "O, may I join the choir invisible!" we note a striking example of this species. It is also seen in Wordsworth's great "Ode on Intimations of Immortality in Childhood" and in much of his naturalistic verse. Thus he writes:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky;
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die.

> The child is father of the man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.

There is also in the lyric a pertinent example of the union of the subjective and the objective, the ideal and the real. While as lyric it has largely to do with subjective states, there is danger lest feeling become morbid, and hence it must have an outlet. Whether it take the form of friendship or patriotism or religion, the object on which the emotion terminates is as essential as the emotion itself, and, indeed, the only occasion of its exercise. Just as soliloquy cannot be the highest form of oral address, as having no audience, so any species of emotion that finds its reason in itself is abnormal and ineffective. Hence one of the tests of lyric verse is found at this point, whether or not the lyrist has an object outside of himself and worthy to elicit the deepest impulses of the soul. In the one case we have the wholesome verse of a Milton and Wordsworth; in the other, the unwholesome verse of a Byron, Clough, and Whitman. It is fortunate for the honor and influence of English poetry that, taken as a whole, it illustrates the union of the inner and the outer—the uniform presence of an end with the effort of the poet to realize it.

Still further, the lyric is noteworthy for the fact that its historical development from age to age has been in keeping with the general development of English verse. The law of development operates

in literature as in nature. There is a literary evolution going on from age to age, appearing at times on the surface of the literature, and at times deeply concealed, and visible only after the closest inspection. Such a development is found to be regular, and ever working toward a definite end, despite occasional variations in the line of the grotesque and abnormal. Hence, in the earlier stages of our national literature, we find what we expect to find—the simple, rather than the more elaborate, forms of the lyric; hymns and songs and idyls and the shorter odes, and not the extended efforts more in keeping with a later age. Such are the lyrics of early English days; such the songs of Wyatt and Surrey at the opening of the Elizabethan era, and the semi-dramatic lyrics of the Elizabethan age itself.

To look for such a lyric as "In Memoriam" in the age of Spenser would be out of keeping with the historic conditions of the time. Though it is, in a sense, true that no form of verse is less dependent on antecedent and contemporary conditions than the lyric, because of its eminent simplicity and naturalness, still it is seen to hold itself substantially amenable to the great principle of historic sequence, and to come to its fullest and best expression when rightfully expected so to do. Thus, by way of confirmation, the lyric is always found in a good degree of excellence at the time of any general poetic awakening. This would seem to

show that it is of the very essence of genuine verse and in vital relation to every other poetic form.

At the very opening of English poetry as national, in the days of Chaucer, this lyric quality was clearly seen in the great descriptive development of the time. In the days of Henry the Eighth it was the dominant type. Even in the Elizabethan age, of special epic and dramatic excellence, this idyllic type was so prominent as to modify every other form—the lyrical portions of the "Faerie Queene" and the Shakespearean plays being so pronounced as to give them a character of their own and incite to their separate study. Later in the history the epic era of Milton was characterized by a decidedly lyrical movement, as seen in Milton himself. Even the age of Queen Anne—an age of prose and didactic verse—was not without some sign of lyric interest and impulse.

When we come to 1727, the opening year of the reign of George the Second, and of the great romantic movement in English poetry, we note that verse is the dominant literary form, and that the golden age of the lyric has dawned; while on through the Victorian era lyric verse has held its way, and is even now, at the close of the century, the most pronounced poetic form, as seen in Swinburne and Tennyson, Watson and Austin. There is a sense, therefore, in which it may with truth be said that the lyric is the most representative form of British poetry.

There is a distinct lyric drift in modern English. Mr. Stedman, in his *Victorian Poets*, speaks of "the fine and sensitive lyrical feeling of America," and adds "that we are not to think that British poetry is to decline with the loss of Tennyson," but that it is to be followed "by a new cycle of lyrical and dramatic achievement." If either element in this prophecy fails, it bids fair to be the dramatic. Lyric poetry, as the poetry of the heart, makes its permanence a kind of moral necessity. Epic verse is to a degree conventional, and must be rare as a literary form. Even dramatic verse, related closely to character as it is, has well-understood conditions, and we have been waiting more than three centuries for a dramatist that may even remind us of Shakespeare. The lyric, however, the fixed form of the sonnet excepted, is absolutely without artistic limitations, as free as the unrestrained utterances of Nature herself in her varied moods. Hence it may exist, as in American verse, in masterly form when other types are below the average of excellence, or, as in British letters, it may divide the honors with other forms.

Lyric poetry is essentially realistic, and as such is demanded by the necessities of modern life. We speak of the drama as realistic in its portraiture of life, and yet the method is purely imitative. In the lyric there is no deputy or substitute for the author, but a heart-to-heart interview, an impression immediate and personal, and thus intensely

vital. We speak of literature and life. In no province of literary product is such a relation so intimate or the affinity so direct, so that many of the wisest critics have yet to learn that it is here and not in the epic or drama that the fountains of verse are reached, that the governing spirit of a people's literature is studied, and that tenable prophecies are made.

Hence the masterly work of the late poet laureate along this lyric line, as also that of Swinburne, while Lang and Dobson, Austin and Watson, clearly discern the manifest meaning of the time in this direction. Out of these aspirings and poetic movements, increasing in vitality, as the century closes, it would not be strange if there should arise in England a master of lyric verse second to none in the antecedent history of our literature.

Meditative Lyrics

There is a sense in which, at the first glance, these terms, meditative and lyric, seem to involve an essential contradiction, the one term indicating that which is thoughtful and studied, and the other that which is marked by impulse and passion.

Such an apparent discrepancy is fully explained when we recall the wide variety of form which lyrics may assume, dependent on the nature and intensity of the feeling that is to be expressed, the special method or manner of its expression, and the particular purpose in view.

Most of all, it is to be clearly borne in mind that feeling may be demonstrative or subdued in its manifestation; may be designed to soothe as well as to stimulate; to allay as well as arouse, and that it may run up and down the entire gamut of human experience, expressing sorrow as well as joy, love as well as hate, settled conditions of the mind as well as sudden and irresistible outbursts of soul. In fine, genuine emotion may exist, though under wise and wholesome restraint, if it is not indeed true that such subdued feeling is the deepest and strongest. Deep and tender pathos, as expressed in some of the lines of Mrs. Browning, is as potent in its way as the more impassioned utterances of the dramatic writers. There is thus, in verse, the presence of what one has called "disciplined impulses," feeling under healthy restraint, and this is the characteristic feature of the lyric as meditative. It possesses what Matthew Arnold has called "intellectual seriousness;" an order of emotion closely allied to thought and subject to its guidance; a pensiveness of spirit, chaste and quiet, musing in secret over the great problem of human life. It is this contemplativeness that so often adds richness and strong poetic effect to an author's deliverances, and which has given us some of the choicest specimens of genuine lyric verse.

The one condition of its existence and acceptability is that the feeling shall control the thought, and never be controlled by it; that the intellectual

element shall never become an end in itself, as it sometimes does in such notable masters of English verse as Dryden and Pope and Gray and Robert Browning. Such an order of lyric is thus widely removed from the domain of the didactic. Because it is reflective it need not be prosaic. Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" and Keats's "On a Grecian Urn" are not lacking in feeling because they are thoughtful. Subdued and chastened sentiment is still sentiment, even though differing in its type from that which is unrestrained and positive.

In fine, the deepest feelings of the heart defy expression, and can only be approximately syllabled in human words.

Hence there is a clear place for this meditative species of lyric poetry, and the student of English letters is surprised to find, as he reads, how large and important this province is. It is questionable, indeed, whether any other form of lyric would be so sadly missed, as it embodies religious emotion, the griefs and struggles and disappointments and aspirations of life, while it is these "meditations of the heart," in poetic form, which will continue to voice themselves in literature so long as life is what it is in its mysteries and longings.

CHAPTER I

Elizabethan Meditative Lyrics

TOO much significance cannot be given to the fact that this lyrical development in the days of Elizabeth appeared just at the time when English verse was taking on what may be called its permanent historic form. Of this, Milton, in his time, was a notable exponent. The great lyric revival of early Georgian days was but little more than a recall of the nation to its former poetic life, while even "The Latter-day Singers," as Mr. Stedman calls them, owe much of what they have been and done to the fact that back in the age of Sidney and Spenser the keynote of genuine lyric passion was struck, the melody of which is still heard among us. To state it conversely, had there been in Shakespeare's time no such idyllic expression, Shelley and Mrs. Browning might have been lyrists of lesser fame, and the high lyric repute of modern England deferred for another century.

Nor is it at all strange that there should have been such a special development of emotional song in the sixteenth century. It was emphatically the age of life and spirit, when thought and feeling and practical activity were inseparably blended—the golden age of man and of the English world. Hence the beautiful lines of Whittier are fully confirmed, as he writes:

I love the old melodious lays
  Which softly melt the ages through,
The songs of Spenser's golden days,
Arcadian Sidney's silvery phrase,
  Sprinkling our noon of time with freshest morning dew.

While all the historic types of lyrics are found—pastoral, descriptive, humorous, and satiric—it is noticeable that the meditative lyric is conspicuous—lyrics pertaining to the quiet and innocence of primitive life, to the struggles and sorrows of earth, and the aspirations of the soul toward light and truth and hope and heaven. Omitting any reference at present to Spenser and Shakespeare, whose lyric product deserves a separate discussion, we may amply illustrate the reflective element in the idyllic poetry of this era by a reference to some of the numerous names of lesser note, it being suggestive that many of these minor authors have little other claims to remembrance than the fact of having penned a few such inspiring utterances of the human heart. Such is Carlton's beautiful madrigal:

Content thyself with thine estate;
  Seek not to climb above the skies.

So, Daniel's pleasing poem, beginning:

If I could shut the gates against my thoughts,
  And keep out sorrow from this room within;
Or memory could cancel all the notes
  Of my misdeeds, and I unthink my sin.

From Lodge's suggestive poem, "Whilst Youthful Sports are Lasting," we read:

Pluck the fruit and taste the pleasure,
Youthful lordings, of delight;
Whilst occasion gives you seizure,
Feed your fancies and your sight;
After death, when you are gone,
Joy and pleasure is there none.

In this poem we note a kind of combination of ethical reflection on the pleasures of life and a somewhat defiant determination to make the most of them while they last, since death will soon bring them to an end. It is a kind of lyric very frequent in the golden age, when so many of the playwrights and poets of the time were men of flexible morality and devoted to the passing pleasures of the hour.

In Robert Greene's "A Mind Content" this contemplative feature is seen in its most attractive form:

Sweet are the thoughts that savor of content,
The quiet mind is richer than a crown;
Sweet are the nights in careless slumber spent;
The poor estate scorns fortune's angry frown.
Such sweet content, such minds, such sleep, such bliss,
Beggars enjoy, when princes oft do miss.

Of this same pensive order is Breton's "The Song of Care:"

Come, all the world, submit yourselves to Care,
And him acknowledge for your chiefest king.

In Greene's pathetic poem, "Miserrimus," we have an example of a large class of Elizabethan lyrics in which the poet pauses for a while, and when it is all too late, to lament the follies of the past and

warn his fellows against similar errors. They are a kind of a dirge forced out of the poet's contemplation of human life and the hopelessness of the outlook. Thus he begins:

> Deceiving world, that with alluring toys
> Hast made my life the subject of thy scorn,
> And scornest now to lend thy fading joys
> T' outlength my life, whom friends have left forlorn;
> How well are they who die ere they be born
> And never see thy sleights, which few men shun
> Till unawares they, helpless, are undone.

In the closing stanza he lamentingly writes:

> O, that a year were granted me to live,
> And for that year my former wits restored;
> What rules of life, what counsel would I give,
> How should my sin with sorrow be deplored!

So, Breton, in his poem "A Doleful Passion:"

> O, tired heart, too full of sorrows
> In nightlike days, despairing morrows,
> How canst thou think, so deeply grieved,
> To hope to live to be relieved?

In Greene's "The Shepherd's Wife Song" we have a beautiful lyric of the pastoral and pensive order. Wilbye's suggestive poem, "All in Naught," reads, in its second stanza:

> There is a jewel which no Indian mines
> Can buy, no chymic art can counterfeit;
> It makes men rich in greatest poverty;
> Makes water wine, turns wooden cups to gold,
> The homely whistle to sweet music's strain,
> Seldom it comes, to few from heaven sent,
> That much in little, all in naught—content.

This ardent longing among the writers of the

time for personal contentment amid the stress and sorrow of the world embodies itself with special fitness in the impassioned lines of lyric verse, so that, in one form or another, almost every poet of the era gave some expression thereto.

William Byrd, in his lines on "The Home of Content," gives partial answer to those who are seeking the source of this priceless boon:

In crystal towers and turrets richly set
With glittering gems that shine against the sun,
In regal rooms of jasper and of jet,
Content of mind not always likes to wun (dwell);
But oftentimes it pleaseth her to stay
In simple cotes inclosed with walls of clay.

Sir Henry Wotton, in his "Character of a Happy Life," goes farther still in solving the mystery, as he cheerily sings:

How happy is he born and taught
That serveth not another's will;
Whose answer is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill;

Who God doth late and early pray,
More of his grace than gifts to lend;
And entertains the harmless day
With a well-chosen book or friend.

This man is free from servile bands
Of hope to rise or fear to fall;
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all.

These are lines worthy of Charles Wesley or of Watts, in their devout and chastened spirit, as they also set the seal of high literary taste and training on their author. It is not a little saddening to turn

from such hearty and hopeful lines as these to Lord Bacon's plaintive poem, "The World," as he mournfully sings:

> The world's a bubble, and the life of man
> Less than a span. . . .
> Cursed from his cradle, and brought up to years
> With cares and fears.

If we now pass from the province of general lyrics to sonnets in particular, we shall find the same reflective feature, what Professor Schelling has happily called "the intellectualized emotion" of the time. The age was naturally that of the English sonnet as based upon the Italian models introduced in the reign of Henry the Eighth. Hence the poets of the period entered this inviting field, while the fact that so many of their sonnets are of the more serious order is in keeping with the general literary movement. Such are Constable's *Spiritual Sonnets to the Honor of God and His Saints*, in which he is said to have been the first one to devote the sonnet to "divine uses." *A Divine Century of Spiritual Sonnets* by Barnes is such a collection. So, Breton's *The Soul's Harmony*, Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, the prevailing dominance of the emotion of love thus having been applied to the sphere of spiritual life. So pronounced was this tendency that a living American critic states "that Chapman's poem 'A Coronet for His Mistress Philosophy' is probably the earliest attempt to write a sonnet sequence neither devotional

nor amatory." To quote from these poems is almost invidious, so characteristic is the minor key of English song, the sounding of the note of human sin and sorrow and care and disappointed hope. If the lyric is the most personal type of verse, the reflective lyric is especially so, the poet as the interpreter of his own life never descending to deeper depths in his complex personality than when meditating on the great themes of duty and destiny with that "high seriousness" that becomes so impressive a topic. Hence the presence of the lyric in the latest as in the earliest era of a people's life, the contemplative lyric being most germane to the full-grown age of national history. When such an order of lyric is strictly kept within its proper emotional area this side the purely didactic, then we have it in its highest form. It is the signal success of such intellectual poets as Milton and Wordsworth in retaining true poetic passion with marked mental ability that designates them at once as masters of this complex art. To make the lyric thoughtful without being didactic, and impassioned without being sentimental, is the ripest result of the poet's art.

Space will not permit us to quote at length from these Elizabethan sonnets. The opening lines of a few of them may be cited, as Sidney's:

> Come, Sleep. O Sleep; the certain kind of peace,
> The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,
> The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
> The indifferent judge between the high and low.

So, in his sonnet beginning:

> Since Nature's works be good, and death doth serve
> As Nature's work, why should we fear to die?

So, the expressive lines of Barnes:

> Ah, sweet Content, where is thy mild abode?
> Is it with shepherds and light-hearted swains
> Which sing upon the downs and pipe abroad,
> Tending their flocks and cattle on the plains?

So, Bishop Donne's devout and penitent strains:

> As due by many titles I resign
> Myself to thee, O God, first, I was made
> By thee and for thee—

Drummond's sonnets, entitled "Human Frailty," "The Book of the World," "Content and Resolute," and "The Praise of a Solitary Life," are all of exquisite literary finish and high moral purpose. It is in the last of these that he sings:

> Thrice happy he who by some shady grove,
> Far from the clamorous world doth live his own;
> Though solitary, who is not alone,
> But doth converse with that Eternal Love.

William Browne, one of the sweetest of the older English lyrists, opens one of his poems in well-nigh faultless form:

> Down in a valley by a forest side,
> Near where the crystal Thames rolls on her waves.

His remarkable sonnet on "Sin" is worthy of a poet-theologian of the days of Knox and the Reformers, as it begins:

> Lord, with what care hast thou begirt us round.

But continued reference is useless in this wide wealth of lyric meditation—"a treasury of English sonnets," indeed, as they have been called, and a treasury, moreover, whose key every English student has in hand so that he may open the door and enter at his will.

If we pass beyond the limits of the golden age in our study of meditative lyrics, the field is simply boundless, and we are at a loss what to choose among these "infinite riches." Of English poets classed as secondary the list is large of those who have written such lyrics that will live as long as the plays of Shakespeare. Such are Thomson, Goldsmith, Cowper, Crabbe, Hood, Gray, Moore, Coleridge, and others, each of whom has made valid contributions to this order of verse. We have not to go outside of such poems as "The Seasons," "The Deserted Village," "The Bridge of Sighs," and "Retirement" for apt examples of reflective verse, while yet possessed of a due degree of genuine poetic emotion.

In the three great eras of the English lyric—the Elizabethan, Georgian, and Victorian—one has but to confine himself to a few great names to see something of the extent and value of this poetic product. In those hours in the experience of each of us, when the head and heart are weary, and we are needing, most of all, rest and solace and strengthening of spirit, there is nothing this side of the inspired word of God so refreshing as these tender musings of our best English bards.

CHAPTER II

The Lyrics of Edmund Spenser

IN the examination of the poetry of Spenser as an English meditative lyrist, it will be best to follow the natural order of his poems, beginning with the "Faerie Queene." Though it is an epical romance, it has specific lyric elements on the meditative side. Thus Spenser writes to Raleigh "that the general end of all the book is to fashion a gentleman in virtuous discipline," the twelve contemplated books, "fashioning twelve moral virtues." The poem as a unit is "an allegory of the human soul." Many of the characters are thus symbolic of spiritual life, its hopes and fears, its struggles and successes, and would not be out of place in such a treatise as Bunyan's *Holy War*. Such are the Red Cross Knight, Una, Duessa and the Dragon. So are the typical scenes, localities, and incidents largely representative of religious life and teaching. The poem, indeed, may be said to have been written in the light of the English Reformation, then under way, and thus became in reality, as it was in purpose, one of the great inspiring agencies to further the cause of English Protestantism against the heresy and tyranny of the papacy. From first to last it is a serious poem, written with high ethical intent. So numerous, therefore, are these lyric lines

EDMUND SPENSER

of a reflective order that we find them on every page of the poem. It is, indeed, questionable whether there is in the language any long narrative poem which has so much idyllic quality and so often is meditative in its spirit without being didactic. Such lyrics are what the psalmist calls "the meditations of the heart."

Thus, in Book First, we read the description of the home of the hermit:

A little lowly hermitage it was,
Down in a dale, hard by a forest's side,
Far from resort of people, that did pass
In travel to and fro; a little wide
There was a holy chapel edified (built)
Wherein the hermit (was) duly wont to say
His holy things each morn and eventide.
Thereby a crystal stream did gently play,
Which from a sacred fountain welled forth alway.

So, in Book Second, the beautiful description of the guardian angels:

How oft do they their silver bowers leave,
To come to succor us that succor want;
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The flitting skies, like flying pursuivant (herald),
Against foul fiends to aid us militant.
They for us fight; they watch and duly ward,
And their bright squadrons round about us plant;
And all for love, and nothing for reward;
O, why should heavenly God to men have such regard!

Passing from this elaborate epic to the shorter poems and the lyrics proper, it is noticeable that they are, in the main, contemplative. The "Shep-

herd's Calendar," in its twelve sections, descriptive, respectively, of the twelve months of the year, is characteristically a pastoral lyric of the pensive type, in which the poet devoutly dwells on those essential truths that seemed to him to need a new expression. Some of the eclogues are eminently reflective as, "January," whose moral is the saving power of hope in trial; "February," a discourse on old age; "June," "October," in which the poet plaintively sings of the contempt of poetry in his day. The closing eclogue, "December," is a dissertation on human life in its four distinctive seasons, from youth to age.

Passing from the "Calendar," we come to the collection called "Complaints," containing, as we are told, sundry small poems of the world's vanity, or, as the printer states to his readers, they are "all complaints and meditations of the world's vanity, very grave and profitable." In what may be called the Canon or Bible of Elizabethan Letters, they constitute the Book of Lamentations, or the Jeremiad, as they in turn lament the loss of what is dearest in life and letters. They have, indeed, the essential features of elegiac verse, as their general title indicates, as also such special titles as "The Ruins of Time," "The Ruins of Rome," "The Visions of the World's Vanity," and "The Tears of the Muses," in which last beautiful monody each of the nine muses bewails the decadence of her favorite art, the manifest decline of poetry seeming to elicit special sorrow

on the part of the mourning poet. Nowhere in the province of English lyrics have we such an unbroken succession of minor notes, sounded somewhat strangely as they were, at the very opening of the golden age. A partial explanation of this anomaly is found in the embittered experiences of the poet himself, in the heroic struggles of the native literature against the various forms of foreign influence, and in the historic fact that so many authors of the time were willing to prostitute their calling to the lowest levels of art and life. "The Tears of the Muses" was not a poem of forced emotion, but an ingenuous outburst of personal scorn over what the sensitive Spenser saw and felt and feared.

Passing to the contemplative poems following the "Complaints," we come to "The Amoretti," or sonnets of Spenser, eighty-eight in number, and expressing in lyric form the meditations of the heart. Not a few of these are specimens of high poetic merit, and rightly place Spenser in the historic succession of the great English sonneteers.

Thus, the sonnet entitled "Most Glorious Lord of Life," as it reads:

> Most glorious Lord of life; that on this day
> Didst make thy triumph over death and sin;
> And having harrowed hell, didst bring away
> Captivity thence captive us to win.
> This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin
> And grant that we for whom thou didst die,
> Being with thy dear blood clean washed from sin,
> May live forever in felicity,
> And that thy love we weighing worthily,

May likewise love thee for the same again ;
And for thy sake, that all like dear didst buy,
With love may one another entertain :
So let us love, dear love, like as we ought,
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.

As further illustrating this special type of lyric we may cite the lines "After Long Storms :"

After long storms and tempests sad assay,
Which hardly I endurèd heretofore,
In dread of death and dangerous dismay,
With which my silly bark was tossèd sore ;
I do at length descry the happy shore,
In which I hope ere long for to arrive,
Fair sail it seems from far and fraught with store
Of all that dear and dainty is alive,
Most happy he ! that can at last achieve
The joyous safety of so sweet a rest,
Where least delight sufficeth to deprive,
Remembrance of all pains which him opprest,
All pains are nothing in respect to this,
All sorrows short that gain eternal bliss.

In such lines as these we have an example not only of genuine lyric verse of the reflective order, but Christian sentiments worthy of a Cowper, and revealing the better side of sixteenth-century life. If the dramatists of the time could produce plays of questionable morale, Spenser, in turn, could clearly prove that a poet need not prostitute his powers to the service of passion in order to describe human affection and the pleasures of social life. These "Amoretti"—little songs of love—served in Spenser's hands to set forth the sacredness of all

earthly affection and sanctify it in the eyes of all England.

It is a significant fact that, while England was indebted to Italy for the sonnet, Spenser began at once to modify the licentious constructions of southern Europe on behalf of virtue and womanhood and social order. Thus it is that in his idyllic poem, "Epithalamion," said to be "thè noblest wedding hymn in the language," and celebrating his marriage to Elizabeth, the central character of his sonnets, we find the same notable departure from continental models, on behalf of home and purity and womanhood. It is the real "Canticles" of our earlier vernacular poetry. After setting forth in graceful and delicate manner the physical beauty of his bride, he passes on by quick transition to the description of her higher and nobler qualities of mind and heart:

> But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,
> The inward beauty of her lively spright (spirit),
> Garnisht with heavenly gifts of high degree,
> Much more, then, would ye wonder at that sight.
> There dwells sweet love and constant chastity,
> Unspotted faith and comely womanhood,
> Regard of honor and mild modesty;
> There Virtue reigns as queen in royal throne,
> And giveth laws alone,
> The which the base affections do obey,
> And yield their services unto her will;
> No thought of thing uncomely ever may
> Thereto approach, to tempt her mind to ill.

From first to last this lyric of wedded love reads as the Song of Solomon, and at once lifted the

Elizabethan conception of bridal joy to the highest ethical level. So, in his celebrated spousal song, "Prothalamion," the same high motives prevail, while it is stated by the poet himself that his two closing poems, "Heavenly Love" and "Heavenly Beauty," were composed "by way of retractation," lest, perchance, his published poems "of earthly or natural love and beauty might be an injury to the cause of good morals in England."

Such, in brief, is the general tone of the lyrics of Spenser, moral and meditative throughout, the heartfelt and thoughtful utterances of an author more intent on diffusing the truth than on writing acceptable verse. In fact, in all the extent of his poetry there is no substantive exception to this dominant note.

Spenser, as a man, was of this pensive type, made more and more so by the caprices of court favor and the consequent struggles of his literary life, and when he wrote he wrote largely from the standpoint of his own experience. It was thus that he loved to portray the valiant knight of his epic as the armed champion of truth and goodness, in his fight with pride and hypocrisy and error and lust, and it was under the veil of allegory that he delivered many a deadly thrust at a corrupt Church and a corrupt State.

Lowell and the other critics are right who insist in placing the name of Spenser in the list of English reformers, not preaching trenchant sermons,

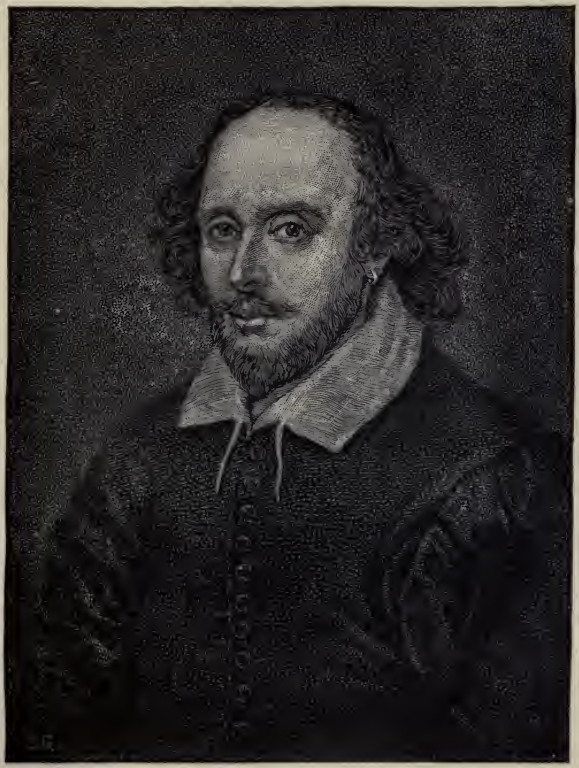
as did Knox and Fox, nor writing a system of Christian philosophy, as did Bacon, but still in his own way, as a Protestant poet, doing a mighty work for England and the Christian world. It is this quality of Spenser's mind and poetic art that Milton emphasizes when he calls him "our sage and serious poet, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotis or Aquinas."

CHAPTER III

The Lyrics of Shakespeare

ATTENTION has already been directed to the richness of the Elizabethan age in its lyrical product. It possessed what Mr. Symonds has justly called "a copious and splendid lyric," favorably comparing, in this respect, as he argues, with the Victorian age of English verse. As a poetic type through which human feeling freely and fully expresses itself, it was eminently adapted to the golden age as an era of English vigor and vitality, the modern age of life and of man, of human hopes and sympathies and joys and sorrows.

Hence the leading poets of the time were quick to discern the meaning of the new epoch in which they lived, and Shakespeare, though standing at the center of the great dramatic movement of the century, and beyond all comparison its chief representative and exponent, failed not to enter this lyric province and enrich it by the entering. So vital and pronounced is his specifically dramatic verse that we are apt to forget or underrate the extent and quality of his lyrics, his entire non-dramatic work being of the lyric order, while the dramas themselves exhibit the frequent presence of this idyllic type. In "Venus and Adonis," "Lucrece," "A Lover's Complaint," and "The Passionate Pilgrim" we note by the titles themselves their distinctive lyr-



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ical tone and teaching, though so often expressed on the merely sensuous side of emotional verse. It is, however, in his sonnets, so suggestive in their autobiographical references, and so full of genuine feeling, that we see the great bard in the character of a lyrist, and find another proof of the fact that there seemed to be no avenue of truth and art open to the view of man which this myriad-minded poet did not discover and enter.

Omitting, therefore, any further reference to the unduly sensuous poems whose titles have been given, there are three distinct and important spheres of verse in which Shakespeare may be studied as a lyrist—in his sonnets, in the songs of the plays, and in those portions of the plays apart from the songs in which a distinct idyllic element enters. Nor are we dealing with his lyrical verse in its entirety, but only with those examples and phases of it that are characteristically meditative—revealing Shakespeare as a "sage and serious poet," "the most profound of moralists," as Guizot calls him, and so often dwelling with intense sobriety of spirit, in his lyrics as in his dramas, on the great problems of human history and destiny, that we find ourselves absorbed and subdued by his reflections. In his great tragedies how pronounced this intellectual sedateness is! Even his comedy is the comedy of life, and, as such, passes by quick transitions from gay to grave, while in his lyrical product one has but to look carefully beneath the outer

form to note a deep undercurrent of sober-mindedness, in which, after all, are seen the real soul and self of Shakespeare.

Turning first to the sonnets, we feel with the American critic, White, as he says, "Whoever can read them once and not read them again and again, borne on and up by their strong flow of feeling, has not the sort of the matter in him," and just to the degree in which they embody the innermost life and experience of the poet himself do they pass from the general type of the lyric as emotional to that specific contemplative type which we are treating in the present volume. When he speaks of love unrequited, of hopes unrealized, of human life in the light of its mistakes and imperfections, of friends inconstant, and the future foreboding, his song descends at once to the minor key, and we find ourselves, for the time, in fullest sympathy with the dominant note of the verse.

A few citations will confirm these suggestions. Thus the opening lines of Sonnet XV:

> When I consider everything that grows
> Holds in perfection but a little moment.

So, in XXIX:

> When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least.

So, in XXX—the beautiful opening lines:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.

In XXXIII, beginning so hopefully,

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,

he likens the hiding of the sun's face with clouds and its final setting in the west to his own clouded hopes and the gradual decline of his day of gladness.

In LX we have an exquisite contemplative touch in the lines:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end.

In Sonnet LXVI he bewails in truly Miltonic manner the decline of virtue and the triumph of falseness over truth and justice and purity.

In Sonnets LXXI to LXXIII we have lines that fitly belong to the province of English elegy, so subdued and regretful is their tone.

Few of the sonnets have been oftener cited than CXLVI, so distinctly meditative, as it opens:

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,
Fooled by these rebel powers that thee array.

Thus these reflective lyrics, from first to last, voice the impassioned experiences of the great poet as he looks in upon himself, and out upon the world and human life, and up toward God and heaven and

truth and love. Whatever, from a literary and critical point of view, may be the accepted theory of their origin and character, whether autobiographical or allegorical, or partly each, their intrinsic poetic quality is lyrical and their governing spirit meditative. Written in the best years of his eventful life, we may confess, with Wordsworth, that in them Shakespeare "unlocked his heart" in a sense and with a freedom that is not discoverable elsewhere, and, in so far as he fails to admit us to the innermost meaning of his life and utterances, to that degree is the meditativeness of the verse increased.

It is that partial revelation which these sonnets give us of some kind of a moral struggle that Shakespeare was waging with himself, at times, with the deepest intensity, that adds to their interest and value, especially in the view of those who are seeking the causes of those varied personal experiences of which Shakespeare was the subject.

Passing from the sonnets to the plays, the most prominent lyrical features are naturally found in the songs which are interspersed throughout, partly for the sake of literary variety and interest, and partly because at the time the lyrical element in the form of a song was better adapted to the purpose of the poet than the mere objective form of the dramatic and narrative. At times, in the prologues and epilogues of the respective plays and in the choruses, this same idyllic feature is present and prominent.

As we examine these songs of the plays it is natural to note that, lyrical as they all are, they differ greatly in the particular phase of feeling or mood of mind that they express; some of them being of a light and almost frolicsome order, suited to the subject in hand, while others assume with equal fitness a graver tone and express a more serious view of life and character. Naturally, in the comedies we have the one and in the tragedies the other of these characteristics, while in the historical plays, as a somewhat mixed type of dramatic verse, we note the presence of each. A few examples will suffice to reveal the fact which we are emphasizing, that even in the songs, where, least of all, we would expect to find it, this specifically meditative note is often struck by the great sonneteer and dramatist.

Thus, in Ariel's Song, in "The Tempest," the familiar lines:

> Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.

Even the Song of the Clown, in "Twelfth Night," reveals this contemplative feature, as it opens:

> Come away, come away, death,
> And in sad cypress let me be laid;

closing in similar strain:

> Lay me, O, where
> Sad true lover ne'er find my grave,
> To weep there!

So, in "Measure for Measure," the Duke sings:

> Peace be with you!
> He who the sword of heaven will bear
> Should be as holy as severe;
> Pattern in himself to know,
> Grace to stand, and virtue go;
> More nor less to others paying
> Than by self-offences weighing. . . .
> O, what may man within him hide,
> Though angel on the outward side!

How well this language agrees with that of the Prince of Morocco, in "The Merchant of Venice," as he examines the golden casket which Portia hands him:

> All that glisters is not gold;
> Often have you heard that told:
> Many a man his life hath sold
> But my outside to behold.

In "As You Like It" we have in "Amiens's Song" a prominent instance of this Shakespearean mood:

I.

> Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
> Thou art not so unkind
> As man's ingratitude;
> Thy tooth is not so keen,
> Because thou art not seen,
> Although thy breath be rude.

II.

> Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
> That dost not bite so nigh
> As benefits forgot:
> Though thou the waters warp,
> Thy sting is not so sharp
> As friend remembered not.

This song of Amiens is especially suggestive as revealing that close connection of the grave and

the gay which we so often find in Shakespeare and the greatest authors, each of the stanzas closing with a refrain marked alike by sobriety and pleasantry.

In the same play is the lyrical language of Celia, as she enters the forest, reading:

> Why should this a desert be?
> For it is unpeopled? No:
> Tongues I'll hang on every tree,
> That shall civil sayings show:
> Some, how brief the life of man
> Runs his erring pilgrimage,
> That the stretching of a span
> Buckles in his sum of age;
> Some, of violated vows
> 'Twixt the souls of friend and friend.

What may be called the responsive song of Guiderius and Arviragus in "Cymbeline" is of this character, a kind of homily in lyric form on the vanity of all things earthly and the common end to which all alike are assigned by the presence of death in the world.

Thus the great bard sings and writes in thoughtful manner, conning over the mysterious human life which he knew so well how to portray in all its phases, passing rapidly from pleasantry to the profoundest introspection and sedateness of spirit, now touching lightly some transient phase of human character, and now impressing on us with all the weight of his immense personality some fundamental fact or truth.

Passing from sonnet and song alike, it may further be noted that even in the plays themselves, written

in blank verse and in obedience to the principles of dramatic art, there is a decided lyrical element, an essential emotiveness and passion, the real idyllic ardor, though not presented in lyric form. This feature is naturally most marked in those portions of the plays which are embodied in rhyme, and as such conform more closely to lyrical models. A single example must suffice.

In "Richard the Second" John of Gaunt is lying on his couch, and thus he meditates on the words of the dying, and how they must enforce attention and respect:

> O, but they say the tongues of dying men
> Enforce attention like deep harmony:
> Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,
> For they breathe truth, that breathe their words in pain.
> He, that no more must say, is listened more
> Than they whom youth and ease have taught to glose;
> More are men's ends marked than their lives before.

This language is neither a sonnet nor a specific lyric in the form of a song, but the uniform iambic pentameter of the plays, written in rhyme, and yet so full of essential lyric quality on the reflective side that it reads as if it were lyric verse in structure, and has upon us all the effect of such an order of verse. The plays, and especiallythe tragedies, are full of such examples; and here, again, in such a rare combination of the lyric and dramatic is seen the genius of this marvelous man. Hence we are not surprised to read from Brandes of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" that "it is to be described

rather as a dramatic lyric than a drama;" and again of "Romeo and Juliet," that "it is in virtue of its exquisite lyrism that this masterpiece has bewitched the world;" and much of this element, as we have seen, is reflective.

Such an element in Shakespeare's verse starts some questions "ill to solve." What was the personal struggle of which he sings in the sonnets? What is the explanation of the emphasis he lays so often on the more serious side of human life? What was his real character as a man, and to what extent, if at all, is this revealed in his lyrics? Did Shakespeare "unlock his heart," as Wordsworth contends, or did he not, as Browning contends? Students of late are discussing with unusual interest the question of Shakespeare's possession or nonpossession of the melancholic temperament, of contemplativeness carried to the extreme of moroseness. Brandes, in his *Critical Study* gives large space to this open question. Suffice it to say that, despite all traces of misanthropy, Shakespeare exhibits in his character what has well been called a "manly seriousness," exhibited, in so far as his lyrics are concerned, in those sonnets and songs and idyllic passages of the plays, that interest us by their intrinsic poetic quality and impress us by their profound meditativeness.

It is gratifying to every English scholar thus to find the greatest of English poets in line with the pervading thoughtfulness of the best English lyrists from Spenser to Tennyson.

CHAPTER IV

The Lyrics of John Milton

AS we take up the examination of Milton's lyrical work, in any aspect of it, we recall the suggestive remark of Charles Lamb, "that a solemn cathedral service of song should be indulged in" as the most fitting preparation for such a study. Early in life, and throughout. he exhibited a characteristic sobriety of temperament, what Masson calls "a deep, habitual, and lovable seriousness." Thus he writes in "Paradise Regained" of the youthful Christ, and as if autobiographically:

> When I was yet a child no childish play
> To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
> What might be public good; myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things.

He acknowledges his "faculty to be but slight" in those frivolities that seemed to absorb so much of the time and energy of others. He could scarcely conceive how his fellow-students at Cambridge could so abuse their privileges. His first sonnet, written at his twenty-third year, is full of this sober reflection on life and its duty:

> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

Milton was constitutionally devout, his character

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as a man and as an author being specifically Hebraic. It is thus in the light of what the great Puritan poet was and did that Wordsworth sings:

> Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour;
> England hath need of thee....
> We are selfish men;
> O, raise us up, return to us again;
> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

It is not strange, therefore, that when we come to the study of Milton's verse its meditative quality should be found to be conspicuous above all others. It is so in his prose and verse alike, in epic and drama and lyric, while it is in lyric verse, most of all, that it appears in its fullness and force, and controls all other features. The fact is that, with the exception of "L'Allegro" and a few of the shorter poems and sonnets, his entire lyrical product is of this reflective order, not a little of it passing over from the specifically secular into the domain of the sacred and spiritual.

Hence he opens his lyrical work, as, indeed, his poetic work, when fifteen years of age, with a paraphrase of two of the psalms of David, the second one of which has become an accepted selection in modern hymnology:

> Let us, with a gladsome mind,
> Praise the Lord, for he is kind.

Then follows what may be called the Christ Series of poems, or the Christus Trilogy, as we have such a trilogy from the old English Cyne-

wulf, in his "Christ," "Andreas," and "Elene," and in Longfellow's "The Divine Tragedy," "The Golden Legend," and "The New England Tragedies." Milton's trilogy consists of his poems "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," "The Circumcision," and "The Passion," the first of these being by far the most notable and beautiful of the three, and the first great poem of Milton. It is to this poem that he alludes in writing to his Italian friend, Diodati, as he says:

"We are engaged in singing the heavenly birth of the King of Peace and the happy age promised by the holy books. This is the gift we have presented to Christ's natal day. On that very morning, at daybreak, it was first conceived."

The prologue, as beautiful as the hymn itself, opens:

> This is the month, and this the happy morn,
> Wherein the Son of Heaven's Eternal King,
> Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
> Our great redemption from above did bring;
> For so the holy sages once did sing,
> That he our deadly forfeit should release,
> And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

The poem proper, "The Hymn," opens with a different stanza:

> It was the winter wild
> While the heaven-born child
> All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies.

The thirteenth stanza is, perhaps, as fine as any, and expresses Milton's favorite doctrine of the music of the spheres:

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
Once bless our human ears
(If ye have power to touch our senses so),
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the base of heaven's deep organ blow;
And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full consort to th' angelic symphony.

Thus it is that this great Christian bard may be said to have opened his literary and poetic life with a hymn of devout tribute to the infant Saviour, this sweet and exultant meditative keynote sounding more or less clearly through every later poem of his pen.

Passing by Milton's "Epitaphs," so called, including the memorable one on Shakespeare, and his short contemplative poems, "On Time" and "At a Solemn Music," the next reflective poem to which we are brought is, "Il Penseroso," its very title, "The Meditator," indicating its reflective character, it being in time and purpose and subject-matter the most distinctive meditative lyric that Milton wrote. As is known by all students of Milton, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are companion lyrics, supplementing each other, each of them written amid the beautiful and peaceful scenes of his father's home at Horton, and aiming together to set forth in fitting manner the joyous and the graver side of human life—"Heart-easing Mirth" and "divinest Melancholy," "the Goddess sage and holy"—each in turn singing its own song and teaching its own lesson. As "L'Allegro"

represents the cavalier, "Il Penseroso" represents the puritan of the day, opposed to despotism in the Church and State, committed in all conscience to the more serious purposes of life, and bent on lifting up to the view of the England of his day a higher standard of faith and morals than that which prevailed, while yet escaping, as he did, the almost equally dangerous extreme of an unnatural asceticism. After invoking "calm Peace and Quiet," "spare Fast," and "retired Leisure," he sings:

> But first, and chiefest, with thee bring
> The cherub Contemplation.

He invokes

> the spirit of Plato to unfold
> What worlds or what vast regions hold
> The immortal mind, that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshly nook.

The poem from first to last is pensive, and at times plaintive making it necessary for the reader to examine every separate line of it for himself, as entering into the structure of this lyric of thoughtfulness. The closing lines are, perhaps, the choicest:

> But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious cloisters pale;
> And love the high embowed roof,
> With antique pillars massy proof,
> And storied windows richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light;
> There let the pealing organ blow
> To the full-voiced quire below,
> In service high, and anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness, through mine ear,

Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heaven before mine eyes.
And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of every star that heaven doth shew,
And every herb that sips the dew;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.
These pleasures, Melancholy, give,
And I with thee will choose to live.

Of the eighteen sonnets of Milton one third, at least, are specifically reflective. Such is the first one, already cited, "On his Being Arrived to the Age of Twenty-three." So, the fourth, "To a Virtuous Young Lady:"

That in the prime of earliest youth
Wisely hast shunn'd the broad way and the green,
And with those few are eminently seen,
That labour up the hill of heavenly truth.

So, the ninth, an elegy. So, especially, the fifteenth sonnet, "On His Blindness:"

When I consider how my life is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide.

It is in the seventeenth, on the same pathetic subject, that he laments his loss and yet would not complain:

Yet I argue not
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate one jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied
In liberty's defence.

In the superb sonnet, the sixteenth, "On the Late

Massacre in Piedmont," we hear a voice to which modern Europe might well now give heed:

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints.

The last of the sonnets is an elegy, "On His Deceased Wife."

We are thus brought to Milton's celebrated lyrico-dramatic poem, "Comus," as containing, with all its other elements, passages and pages of distinctly meditative verse on the high theme that he was discussing. Written in the same year with "Il Penseroso," and amid the quiet retreats of Horton, it has much of that deep and tender seriousness that marks the shorter lyric, while in its rich descriptions, its pastoral and idyllic beauty, its Doric diction, and its noble theme and purpose, it is next to Milton's great epic, his poetic masterpiece. Nor can its pervasive contemplative spirit surprise us when we remember that the author in composing it had his eye upon the gross excesses of the Restoration induced by the transfer of Gallic customs and morals to English shores. Just because the policy of the time was to confound all ethical distinctions Milton was eager to exalt the claims of personal and social purity over the exacting demands of the sensualism of the time. Comus and his bestial retainers must be routed by the lady and her brothers, and the triumph of true love and womanhood be secured.

The opening lines of the prologue well suggest

the exalted tone of the poem as the Attendant Spirit sings:

> Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
> My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
> Of bright aërial spirits live insphered.

Throughout the poem the contrast is marked between the wild and rollicking riot of Comus and his band and the sweet and chaste temper of the lady and Sabrina, the nymph, the symbol of purest love. As the elder brother says to the younger:

> He that has light within his own clear breast
> May sit in the centre and enjoy bright day;
> But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
> Benighted walks under the midday sun;
> Himself is his own dungeon.

Or, as he later beautifully states it:

> So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity
> That when a soul is found sincerely so,
> A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
> Driving far oft each thing of sin and guilt;
> And in clear dream and solemn vision
> Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear.

The poem throughout is an earnest plea for what is best and noblest, a personal testimony to the sure success of goodness, a call to faith in Providence as the guardian of character, and a righteous protest against the malicious deceits of sin. Sabrina, the nymph, "goddess of the silver lake," whose best office is "to help ensnared chastity," is one of the sweetest characters in British poetry, and aptly symbolic of the spirit of the poem. In the closing couplets of the lyric we find its meaning:

> Mortals, that would follow me,
> Love Virtue; she alone is free;
> She can teach ye how to climb
> Higher than the sphery chime;
> Or, if Virtue feeble were,
> Heaven itself would stoop to her.

Such is the Miltonic tone, the underlying thoughtfulness of these charming lyrics, so that as we read them we are purified and uplifted and our souls set in harmony with that music of the spheres of which the author was wont to speak. Reverent and spiritual in character, scorning all that was low and sordid by the influence of a natural and supernatural impulse, his spirit brooded in holy contemplation over these high questions of life and destiny, and when he voiced his musings in song it was only that he might inspire others to similar reflections and aspirations.

No one fully understands Milton who does not know him in these softer and sweeter expressions of his soul, this side the province of his epic verse, and where he seems more confidentially to reveal himself to those who would hear the message that he teaches. In his cogent and polemic and often violent prose he is seldom his best self. In "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," with all their poetic merits, he holds in reserve some of the choicest manifestations of his nature, while in "Samson Agonistes," as nowhere else, the coarser fiber of his mind and art is visible.

Milton the lyrist, and the meditative lyrist, is

Milton at his best, as with his "large and luminous eye" he looks into the face of truth and love and tells us what he thinks and feels and sees. It was not in controversial disputes of voice or pen that Milton found his mission, nor in any open entrance into the arena of public strife, but in the "quiet and still air of delightful studies," or, as he sings in "Comus:"

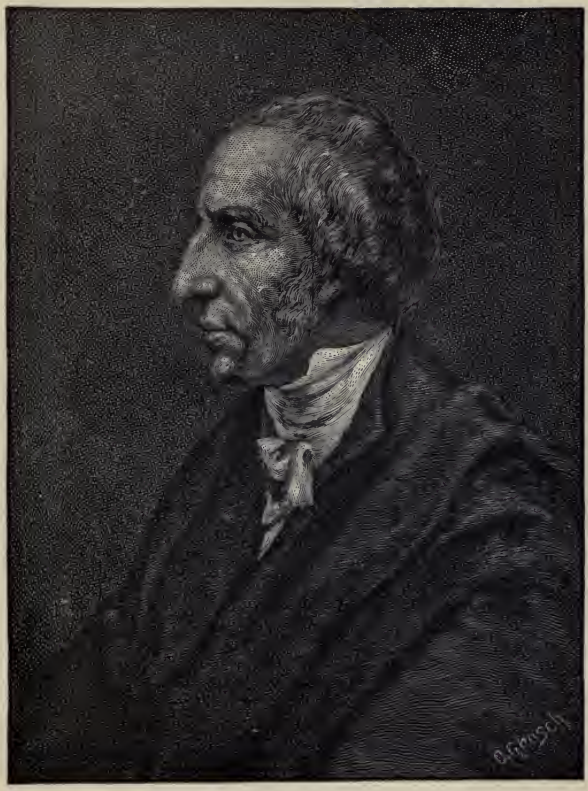
> In regions mild of calm and serene air,
> Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
> Which men call earth.

CHAPTER V

The Lyrics of William Wordsworth

FROM the age of Milton to that of Wordsworth is a long literary and poetic interval, and yet an interval that must be passed by the student of British lyrics, on their meditative side, and as produced by representative bards. In the earlier years of the transition the sensualism of the Stuart rule made such an order of lyric impossible; while in the later years the classicism and formalism of the age of Anne and the earlier Georges were almost equally unfriendly to real poetic ardor. We look in vain in Dryden and Pope, the two great poets of the interval, for such a species of verse in any but exceptional instances; while Gay and Ramsay, Shenstone and Gray, Thomson and Collins and Beattie, and even Goldsmith and Cowper, cannot in justice be cited in connection with the name of Milton, important as their work is, and illustrative, as it sometimes is, of that contemplative lyrical element that we are seeking. The only lyrist of note in this extended period—from the death of Milton, 1674, to the birth of Wordsworth, 1770—is Robert Burns, whose birth in 1759 may fairly place him in the age of Wordsworth with the great romanticists.

On the tablet above Wordsworth's pew, in the little church at Grasmere, we read: "In memory



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

of William Wordsworth, a true philosopher and poet, who by the special gift and calling of Almighty God, whether he discoursed on Man or Nature, failed not to lift up the heart to Holy Things, tired not of maintaining the cause of the Poor and Simple, and so in perilous times was raised up to be a chief minister, not only of Noblest Poesy, but of High and Sacred Truth." No tribute could be truer than this, as no one has read but a little way into the inner meaning of this great poet's mind and art without discovering that the interests of "high and sacred truth" were prized by him above all else, and that poetry, in its best conception, was but one agency among others for the renovation of the race. It is thus that his theory of poetry included the moral and spiritual as fundamental factors, as from his earliest boyhood, among the hills of Westmoreland, he was preinclined to the devout and reverential. It was difficult for him to understand how anyone, young or old, could take any other view of life. Hence it is that in the discussion of poets and lyrists that are eminently meditative we turn instinctively to the pages of Wordsworth. In fact, so prominent is this order of verse that it constitutes by far the larger part of his poetic product. Not only is it the dominant feature in his elegiac verse, in Poems of Sentiment and Reflection, so called; in his Ecclesiastical Sketches, and in Poems of Old Age, but in Poems of the Fancy and Imagination, in his Miscellaneous Sonnets, and "The

Excursion"—whatever he wrote being marked by the same contemplative spirit. In enumerating the six different qualifications of the poet, sensibility and reflection are designated as essential, expressing themselves, as he says, in the forms of lyric, idyllic, and didactic verse. "Poems," he says, "to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual sensibility, had also thought long and deeply."

Hence the emotive element in his verse, as the apt expression of his broad human sympathies. It was on this plane of catholic and cosmopolitan sympathy that he stood in close communion with the poet Burns and often incurred the unjust opprobrium of the better and conservative classes. It was not that he regarded the great and favored classes less, but the lowly classes more, and aimed to be the poet of the English yeomanry and commonalty—to voice their loves and hates, their griefs and struggles. While we find in his verse but little passion expressed in bold, demonstrative form, and stirring to the depths the innermost soul of the reader, still true feeling is there in subdued yet substantive power, and cannot fail in doing its beneficent work in every reflective soul. Hence, also, on the other hand, the intellectual tone and quality of his verse, so that he appears as a thinker as well as an observer, reflecting as he observes outward phenomena:

> The outward show of sky and earth,
> Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
> But impulses of deeper birth
> Have come to him in solitude.

He was always cogitating—a kind of dreamer afield, looking in far more than looking out—so that even "The Excursion," as we know, is but the second part of a larger contemplated work, "The Recluse." A man of few books, he spent the larger part of his life in pondering over the great thoughts of God and man—the power of his poetry lying thus in its seminal and suggestive ideas. Thus he writes, in "The Prelude," of

> . . . men for contemplation formed,
> Shy and unpracticed in the strife of phrase,
> Words are but under agents in their souls,
> When they are groping with their greatest strength
> They do not breathe among them.

All true poetic emotion is thus placed by him under the government of thought. Poetry is the expression of contemplative feeling. Lyric verse, he would say, is essentially meditative—a thing which, at times, it must be conceded, led him to the extreme of didacticism in verse. When held, however, within its proper province it yielded some of the richest specimens of thoughtful sentiment seen in British poetry.

One of the finest examples of this type of feeling is found in what may be called his lyrics of nature, deeply in love as he was with the beauties of the physical world, and never missing an opportunity

of connecting natural and supernatural phenomena. What he called the spirit of nature was, in his view, but one of the many manifestations of the divine Spirit—as he tells us:

> A gracious Spirit o'er the world presides,
> And o'er the heart of man.

So, he writes, in "The Prelude:"

> Thou, O Nature, hast fed
> My lofty speculations, and in thee
> For this uneasy heart of ours I find
> A never-failing principle of joy
> And purest passion.

Reversing Professor Drummond's language, he saw spiritual law in the natural world. In his reflective monologues among the mountains he was thoroughly himself and most at home, and sought to study Deity both in his written and unwritten word.

> Early had he learned to reverence the volume
> That displays the mystery, the life which cannot die,
> But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.

So, he moralizes whenever he looks outward and upward:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky;
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die.
> The child is father of the man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.

In a poem on "The Influences of Natural Ob-

jects," printed among the Poems of Childhood, he sings, in passionate fondness, of what nature was to him and had done for him:

> Wisdom and spirit of the universe!
> Thou soul, that art the eternity of thought! . . .
> . . . not in vain,
> By day or starlight, thus from my first dawn
> Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
> The passions that build up our human soul
> . . . purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought
> . . . happy time
> It was indeed for all of us; for me
> It was a time of rapture.

It was this union in verse, as in his personality, of feeling and thought, expressing itself in a kind of mental emotiveness or fervid reflection, that he aimed to illustrate as the very ideal of poetic art.

To exemplify by reference and citation the way in which Wordsworth embodied this principle would take us fairly through the content of his published verse. A brief and general survey must suffice, with here and there a confirming quotation. In his Poems of Childhood and Juvenile Pieces, as they are called, we note such selections as "We are Seven," a sweet lyric of childlike innocence and faith; "The Longest Day," "An Evening Walk," in which the country-loving Wordsworth dwells upon the scenes of his youth among the English lakes; and "Descriptive Sketches," in which he recalls his tour among the Alps, and takes occasion to descant upon the

glories of mountain scenery, the free and happy life of the mountaineers, and the blessings of civil liberty:

> Were there below a spot of holy ground
> Where from distress a refuge might be found,
> And solitude prepare the soul for heaven;
> Sure, nature's God that spot to man had given
> Where falls the purple morning far and wide
> In flakes of light upon the mountain side.

So, in the Poems of Imagination, where the contemplative feature might not be expected to appear, we see it in such titles as "The Pass of Kirkstone," "Evening Ode," and "Lines on Tintern Abbey." It is in this last poem that, on revisiting the banks of the Wye, he recalls the old scenes and experiences that he once enjoyed:

> Feelings, too,
> Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
> As have no slight or trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.
>
> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth, of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear—both what they half create,

And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

This subjective study of objective things, this mutual exercise of the inner eye of the soul and the outer eye of sense, is one of the pleasing marvels of Wordsworth's verse. Whatever he sees or wherever he goes these "meditations of the heart" are the most natural expression of his personality, and hence it is that in his so-called descriptive poetry there is not only a thoughtful but an emotive element, a genuine lyric impulse and impression. In the examples entitled Poems of Sentiment and Reflection we would naturally look for numerous instances of the lyric of meditation. In fact, the selections may be cited almost without exception. Such are "Character of the Happy Warrior," "The Wishing-gate," "The Fountain," "Remembrance of Collins," "The Two April Mornings," "September," and the "Ode to Duty."

Stern daughter of the voice of God . . .
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through
Thee, are fresh and strong.

The closing stanza runs as follows:

To humbler functions, awful power,
I call thee; I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
O, let my weakness have an end;

Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy bondman let me live.

The closing line of each verse, being the iambic pentameter of the Spenserian stanza, adds to the essential beauty of the sentiment and the meter.

If we turn to the sonnets of Wordsworth, we note some of the choicest examples of the reflective lyric, whether in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty, those To the River Duddon, or the Miscellaneous Sonnets. The first of these collections is especially interesting, as commemorating the early life of Britain and Saxon England. Such are "Monastery of Old Bangor," "Paulinus," "Alfred," "The Norman Conquest," and many others, all pondering on the old life of saints and monks and the struggles of the early Christians, some of them in their protest against the sins of the clergy reading like passages from the pen of Langelande and Milton, while others, in a peaceful and pensive spirit, speak of God and truth and love and human hopes. Thus, in "Places of Worship," we read:

As star that shines dependent upon star
Is to the sky while we look up and love;
As to the deep, fair ships which, though they move,
Seem fixed, to eyes that watch them from afar;
As to the sandy desert fountains are,
With palm groves shaded at wide intervals,
Whose fruit around the sunburnt native falls,
Of roving tired or desultory war—

Such to this British Isle her Christian fanes,
Each linked to each for kindred services;
Her spires, her steeple towers with glittering vanes
Far-kenned, her chapels lurking among trees,
Where a few villagers on bended knees
Find solace which a busy world disdains.

So, in the Sonnets to Liberty, we have some of the finest lyric outbursts in English, stanzas in which Wordsworth strongly reminds us of Milton, his tribute to whom is perhaps the best and the best known of all:

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour;
England hath need of thee.

So, the sonnet beginning:

Great men have been among us; hands that penned
And tongues that uttered wisdom.

So, the lyrics dedicated to "Toussaint L'Ouverture" and "Hoffer" are of the same impassioned order, the poet, in not a few instances, sharply rebuking his country for her moral supineness and positive national sins.

The sonnets To the River Duddon are in Wordsworth's happiest vein, full of his genuine love for the sights and sounds of nature, as he sings:

O mountain stream! the shepherd and his cot
Are privileged inmates of deep solitude.

The closing sonnet of the collection is characteristic in its quiet and impressive meditativeness:

I thought of thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away. Vain sympathies!
For, backward, Duddon, as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide;

The form remains, the function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish; be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.

So, in his Miscellaneous Sonnets, the note is struck, as he sings of life and death and immortality. Thus, from first to last, this thoughtful poet of the English lakes is embodying his musings in lyric form, even his long reflective poem, "The Excursion," containing passages not a few of genuine emotive impulse. Critics of Wordsworth's verse have far too often erred in demanding that poetic feeling shall be always strongly and openly expressed in order to save the poetry from the charge of didacticism, the fact being that the feeling expressed under some degree of restraint, if, indeed, it be genuine, is often all the more potent thereby. Though Wordsworth was not a lyrist in the same sense in which Burns and Byron were lyrists, this is not to say that he had not in his soul the natural lyric ardor, and did not in his way embody it in verse. Read where we will, there is a deep undertone of healthy and inspiring sentiment, and always under the control of judgment. One of the chief reasons why Wordsworth has been the subject of high eulogium at the hands of impartial criticism, and why his fame is steadily growing with the cen-

tury, is seen in the fact that he has dealt in his verse with the primary human instincts and aimed to minister to their needs. After all, the heart of man was his engaging theme, and it was on this emotive theme that he spent his best thought and gave it as he did to the world.

Thus, a living English poet of promise, William Watson, gratefully pays this tribute to him:

> Enough that there is none since risen who sings
> A song so gotten of the immediate soul,
> So instant from the vital fount of things
> Which is our source and goal;
> And though at touch of later hands there float
> More artful tunes than from his lyre he drew,
> Ages may pass ere trills another note
> So sweet, so great, so true.

CHAPTER VI

The Lyrics of Lord Byron

EVEN Matthew Arnold would concede that the study of the character and writings of Lord Byron is an interesting one. Since the days when he was in the prime of his poetic power there has been a kind of fascination about him, always sufficient to charm and captivate the reader. Hence the large number of biographies of him, of criticisms, of treatises, and data respecting him, so that what we may term Byroniana would constitute a substantial library in itself. Moore and Macaulay, Goethe, Saint Beuve, and Taine, and Henley, and scores of others have spoken and written, and the theme is still a fresh one. Even those most alive to his defects and errors are not slow in calling attention to his varied gifts and to the permanent impress he has made on British and European letters. "The most celebrated Englishman of the nineteenth century," says Macaulay, while Carlyle, on the other hand, asserts "that no genuine productive thought was ever revealed by him to mankind."

Whatever difference of opinion may exist, however, as to Byron's personal character and general literary influence, it may be said, in confirmation of the special topic before us, that he was, first of all, a British lyrist, a genuine singer of the school of

LORD BYRON

natural poets. Feeling is one of the cardinal features of his poems. "Almost all I have written," he says, "has been mere passion. My very indifference was a kind of passion." He was, as Taine states it, "predisposed to poetry by innate fire." Thus, he wrote in "Hours of Idleness:"

> O! how I hate the nerveless, frigid song,
> The ceaseless echo of the rhyming throng,
> Whose labor'd lines in chilling numbers flow,
> To paint a pang the author ne'er can know!
> The artless Helicon I boast is youth;
> My lyre, the heart; my muse, the simple truth.

So, again, in "Hints from Horace:"

> 'Tis not enough, ye bards, with all your art,
> To polish poems; they must touch the heart;
> Where'er the scene be laid, whate'er the song,
> Still let it bear the hearer's soul along.

We are not inquiring now as to the moral quality of Byron's song, whether good or bad. That it was emotional in the larger portion of its expression, and thus lyrical, there can be no doubt. "I could not write upon anything," he said, "without some personal experience;" and hence the pronounced autobiographical feature of much of his verse. In this sense, what he wrote he wrote from the soul out. As particularly applicable to the meditative lyric as a distinct type of lyric, it may be noted that Byron aimed in his own way to examine and settle the problem of life. On this portentous and to him ominous problem he was ever cogitating, even when least suspected of so doing by those who knew him best. A puzzling problem to himself, the out-

side world of men and things was equally a mystery, and in his gayest hours, should one carefully scan his features, he wore the look of a mystic conning over the perplexing questions of life. This is the inner cast, visible or concealed, of all his verse, —descriptive, dramatic, or idyllic—while in the last or lyric form as lyric it comes to its fullest expression. In this sense Byron was a philosopher—inquisitive and contemplative—brooding over the unsettled mystery of man and the universe.

When to this is added the fact that he was out of sympathy with the moral order of the world, and consciously so, there is a pensiveness about his verse which takes at times the form of pathos, and often of sadness and confirmed despondency, breaking out here and there, despite all his efforts at restraint, in a loud and pathetic cry against himself, his fellows, and their irremediable fate. It is this that gives to his lyrics especially that subjective type of the monologue which all students have discerned, and which constitutes the very essence of meditative verse. In some of his dramas, as in "Cain," this emotion is embodied in a bitter and hopeless lament over the distress of the present and the forebodings of the future. Hence, in looking into his collected lyrics for evidences of such an order of thought and feeling, we may almost open the pages at random, so deep and evenly diffused is the governing principle, the utterance of his innermost feeling passing by rapid transitions from grave to

gay, and from an apparently insoluble perplexity of spirit to something like an open vision of truth and light; from doubt and despondency to some degree of faith and hope. As an example of the best side of Byron's work as a lyrist of the reflective order, we may refer to his Hebrew Melodies, specimens, as they are, of sacred songs and odes, and in which this tempest-tossed soul seemed for a time to find a haven; some of them reading as if they might have been written by Keble or Cowper. Thus, in the lyric entitled "If That High World:"

If that high world, which lies beyond
Our own, surviving love endears,
If there the cherish'd heart be fond,
The eye the same, except in tears—
How welcome those untrodden spheres!
How sweet this very hour to die,
To soar from earth and find all fears
Lost in thy light—eternity.

It is in this collection that the memorable "Vision of Belshazzar" and "The Destruction of Sennacherib" are found, while such selections as "The Destruction of Jerusalem" and "The Ruin of Babylon," "On Jordan's Banks" and "Jephtha's Daughter," sing in the same plaintive strain of the sorrow of Israel. In the poem "When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay" the bewildered Byron moralizes over the future destiny of the disembodied soul, while in such examples as "All is Vanity," "I Saw Thee Weep," and "My Soul is Dark" we read between the lines the longings and misgivings of their author. Thus, in the last:

My soul is dark. O! quickly string
The harp I yet can brook to hear;
And let the gentle fingers fling
Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.
If in this heart a hope be dear,
That sound shall charm it forth again;
If in these eyes there lurk a tear,
'Twill flow, and cease to burn my brain.

But bid the strain be wild and deep,
Nor let the notes of joy be first;
I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,
Or else this heavy heart will burst;
For it hath been by sorrow nursed,
And ach'd in sleepless silence long;
And now 'tis doom'd to know the worst,
And break at once—or yield to song.

Here we note the poet's own soul in process of self-revelation, and there was something in the lost glories and sad memories of the old Hebrew folk that seemed to appeal directly to the heart distresses which were his portion and his curse. Here we see the bond of union between Byron and the poet Shelley, and once and again, as we read, we recall the troubled life and despondent melodies of our own American Poe.

In the lyric collection, Hours of Idleness, the poems "On Leaving Newstead Abbey" and "The Tear" are deserving of emphasis. Turning to what are known as his Fugitive Pieces or Miscellaneous Poems, we find by far the largest and most impressive illustrations of Byronic meditative mood in the sphere of lyric verse, not a few of the selections ranking in idyllic merit with those of

any British poet. Thus, in the poem entitled "Stanzas," he pathetically recalls past pleasures, and sighs for immediate relief from the accumulating woes of the world:

I loved—but those I loved are gone;
Had friends—my early friends have fled.
How cheerless feels the heart alone
When all its former hopes are dead!
Though gay companions o'er the bowl
Dispel a while the sense of ill,
Though pleasure stirs the maddening soul,
The heart—the heart is lonely still.
Without a sigh would I resign
This busy scene of splendid woe,
To make that calm contentment mine
Which virtue knows or seems to know.

So in the beautiful lyric "Childish Recollections," in which he deplores the absence in early years of parental love and care. Equally beautiful and pensive is "The Dream," in which are traced the varying fortunes of a noble youth and maiden.

And both were young, and one was beautiful,
And both were young, yet not alike in youth.
As the sweet moon on the horizon's verge,
The maid was on the eve of womanhood;
The boy had fewer summers, but his heart
Had far outgrown his years, and to his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him;
she was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all.

So the well-known lyric "Maid of Athens, Ere We Part" and the sorrowful strains of his "Euthanasia," as it closes with the despairing quatrain:

Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,
Count o'er thy days from anguish free,
And know, whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be.

On a similar key, and in the closing year of his short life, he sums up his sad experiences in a single stanza:

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.

And so these mournful meditations of the poet go on in stanza, ode, and sonnet and sketch and drama—in "Bride of Abydos" and "Prisoner of Chillon" and "Don Juan" and "Lament of Tasso" and "Childe Harold;" the lyric passages in this last descriptive poem being so pronounced and numerous as almost to constitute it an English lyric. Certainly no one of his poems is more meditative and subjective, full of autobiographical reference, and revealing the unfortunate author at his best and at his worst.

There is, to our mind, in all the verse of Byron no sadder lyric than the one entitled "The Prayer of Nature," in which the disconsolate poet would fain bespeak for himself the pardoning mercy of God:

Father of Light! great God of Heaven!
Hear'st thou the accents of despair?
Can guilt like man's be e'er forgiven?
Can vice atone for crimes by prayer?

Father of Light, on thee I call!
Thou seest my soul is dark within;
Thou who canst mark the sparrow's fall,
Avert from me the death of sin.

Nowhere does the sharp conflict between principle and passion appear more clearly than in such petitions as these, in which, for the time being, the dissolute and carnal-minded Byron laments his errors and, in his own way, makes direct appeal to the divine power. Credit must be thus given him for at least attempting the part of the contrite suppliant, if so be the desperate forces within him might be somewhat checked. How striking just here is the difference between the lyric contemplations of a Milton or a Wordsworth, and those of Byron, as also seen in the respective poems of Whittier and Poe! In the one case, we breathe the tonic air of an October morning as it blows in upon us from the mountains and the sea; in the other, we inhale the noxious damps and vapors of the lowlands and the forest. In the one, we are in the presence of a healthy and healthful order of feeling, clear and strong and sweet and pure, invigorating and refreshing us, and awakening an appetite for larger measures of it; in the other, we are the recipients of a sickly sentimentalism, by the influence of which we are enervated and depressed, and from whose malign effects we would fain be freed. Chaucer and Burns and Moore, with all their faults, are fresher and more wholesome as we read them, and our souls revolt more and more earnestly against this

dwelling on the nether side of things, on the lower levels of human thought and feeling.

At this point we find one of the severest tests of the genuine lyrist on the reflective side, not only that he is able to be reflective without becoming prosaic and didactic in his verse, and thus defeat the very end of lyric poetry as emotional, but that he may be reflective without becoming morbid, and thus defeat the end of lyric poetry as pure and wholesome. As there is something in meditation which tends, if not guarded, to mere speculation or idle reverie, so is there something which tends to the unhealthy and morose, to a sensuous and debasing mysticism.

Lyric poets, in so far as meditative, may be classified at this point as failing or succeeding. It was here that Byron, in common with Shelley and Matthew Arnold and Clough and Poe, has failed, and here that Spenser and Milton and Wordsworth and Keats and Tennyson have succeeded—profoundly thoughtful without being scholastic or academic in their verse, and profoundly subjective without being misanthropic or sensuous—true lyrists of the soul in its best moods and ideals.

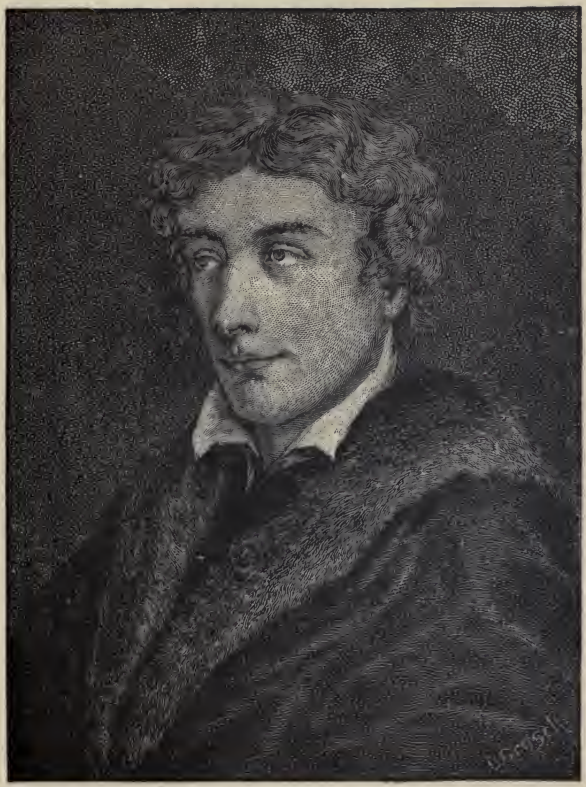
It is to the lasting honor of English lyric verse that by far the larger expression of it is on this saner and safer side of human feeling, and is here in significant contrast with the lighter lyrics of France and southern Europe. In fact, the crisp and vigorous climate of the north of Europe ex-

presses itself in the character and poetry of the people, so that we look in vain in Scottish or Scandinavian or German lyrics for anything like a conspicuous presence of the effeminate and despondent. The racial stock is too stanch and bracing, and the general influences of the old Teutonic folk too invigorating, to foster any other than a sturdy line of poets. Byron himself, though an English poet, was in character and literary habit a practical south European, more at home among the softer influences of Venice and Ravenna than in the more bracing air of central and northern England. A genuine lyrist at heart and in his poetic ideals, what might he not have been in all that makes for mastery in song had his meditations on God and man been rightly guarded and guided!

CHAPTER VII

The Lyrics of John Keats

IT is not surprising that John Keats should have been one of Mr. Lowell's favorite English poets, nor that his eulogiums of him and his work should border at times close upon the extravagant. His personal sensitiveness of character, his love of the best books, his interest in classical studies, and his cultivated classical taste, his gallant fight against depressing obstacles in impaired health and ungenerous criticism, and his high grade of poetic production all endeared him to the appreciative American author. "Even yet," says Lowell, writing of his poems, "as we turn the leaves, they seem to warm and thrill our fingers with the flush of his fine senses;" and he places him in high poetic fellowship and service when he says that "Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron were the great means of bringing back English poetry from the sandy deserts of rhetoric and securing for her her triple inheritance of simplicity, sensuousness, and passion." Of the three, he writes, Keats was "the most essentially a poet, and had the broadest mind." Here, at once, we have the essentials of lyric verse—a broad mind expressing itself in simplicity and sensuousness and passion, the essentials, indeed, of the meditative lyric as the utterance of thoughtful feeling. Attributing, as he did, the awakening of his poetic genius



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to his early familiarity with Spenser, we find in his lines much of that same well-governed, and yet natural, emotion that attracts us in the "Shepherd's Calendar" and the "Tears of the Muses."

There was everything in his short and troubled life, in the fineness of the texture of his faculties and spirit, and in his lofty and chastened ideal of what a poet should be to make his verse specifically contemplative. That he should or could have written such a poem as Byron's "Manfred" or Burns's "Tam O'Shanter" or Scott's "Marmion" is really out of the question, so quiet and subdued were his mental processes, so delicate and tender his poetic sensibilities, and so averse was he to all that busy bustling that confounds the man of letters with the man of affairs.

The actual poetic product of Keats was not large, nor in his brief life of twenty-six years could it have been so, while the sum total of his verse could be classified as his longer poems, such as "Hyperion" and "The Eve of Saint Agnes," and his shorter poems, including odes, epistles, and lyric sketches, such as the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "The Eve of Saint Mark." The range of his work was thus practically limited to the lyric and descriptive, even though we note occasional instances of epic and dramatic passages. As fond as he was of the mind and art of Homer, his gift was less Homeric than Sapphic or Theocritean. Though he wrote to a friend, "One of my ambitions is to

make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting," he failed to make, nor could he have made, any such "revolution," his special gifts lying within the well-defined and attractive province of the idyllic—the poetry of genuine sentiment, the natural expression of the heart of man. Hence he is correctly classed among the later Elizabethans, in that he magnified the natural above the formal; sought to voice the deepest instincts and sympathies of his fellows, and called his countrymen back, as best he could, to primary poetic principles, to Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, to the supremacy of truth and love and liberty and life. Hence his love of Burns and Wordsworth. Hence his love of nature and outdoor life, its freedom and freshness and healing peace, as here his contemplative spirit "holds communion with her visible forms," as to his open ear "she speaks a various language." Rarely in all his verse does he evince this brooding pensiveness, this deep and hallowed thoughtfulness, more impressively than in these irrepressible outbursts of soul in the presence of the world's visible, sentient life, in hill and valley and wood and stream, thinking and versifying somewhat as Wordsworth did whenever he comes fully under the benign influences of earth and sky, and seeks to embody his feeling in appropriate forms.

Some of these poems and passages may be cited as specially illustrative of what may be called the

meditative lyric of nature. Thus he opens one of his sonnets:

> To one who has been long in city pent
> 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
> And open face of heaven—to breathe a prayer
> Full in the smile of the blue firmament.

So, in the beautiful poem "Sleep and Poetry:"

> No one who once the glorious sun has seen
> And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean
> For his great Maker's presence, but must know
> What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow.

So, in his "Ode to a Nightingale," "Autumn," "The Thrush," "On May Day," "Walking in Scotland," and "Staffa." So, in the expressive sonnet "The Human Seasons:"

> Four seasons fill the measure of the year;
> There are four seasons in the mind of man.

In another sonnet he feelingly writes:

> O! how I love, on a fair summer's eve,
> When streams of light pour down the golden west,
> And on the balmy zephyrs tranquil rest
> The silver clouds, far, far away to leave
> All meaner thoughts, and take a sweet reprieve
> From little cares.

So, what he entitles his last sonnet opens with the same reflective strain:

> Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art.

Few poets have thus so happily blended the observation of external nature with the most contemplative moods of the soul, and thus minimized the distance between the natural and the supernatural,

herein reminding us of Wordsworth and the serious-minded poets of the English lakes.

How sadly suggestively he writes, in view of his brief career:

> Life is but a day—
> A fragile dewdrop on its perilous way
> From a hill's summit.
> Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;
> The reading of an ever-changing tale;
> The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;
> A pigeon, trembling in clear, summer air;
> A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,
> Riding the springy branches of an elm.

In fact, whatever his love of nature, he never lost sight of the higher interests of man and human life. "Scenery is fine," he writes, "but human nature finer; the sward is richer for the tread of a real nervous English poet; the eagle's nest is finer for the mountaineers having looked into it." It is amid the rapturous enjoyment of the outer world of sense that he reminds us of the superior claims of the inner world of thought and feeling as he writes:

> And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts.

It is therefore eminently natural for us to expect to find this meditative temper all the more pervasive and intense when we leave the province of these outdoor, naturalistic lyrics and enter that of the lyric of subjective interest and emotion, where the soul of the lyrist enters into its own secret

chamber and shuts the door. Here is opened the entire content of his verse, expressed, at times, in such of the longer and more didactic poems, as "Endymion," "Hyperion," and "Lamia," but more especially, as in Milton, in those shorter and sweeter poems, which are replete with poetic beauty and are the best expression of the author's intense thought and life, as in "Sleep and Poetry," "The Eve of Saint Agnes," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and such sonnets as these, opening:

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone.

Thus, in "Isabella," he describes the love of Isabella and Lorenzo:

> With every morn their love grew tenderer,
> With every eve, deeper and tenderer still.

So, in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn:"

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter.

Perhaps, if among his meditative lyrics one must be selected to the exclusion of all others, it would be that matchless sacred idyl "The Eve of Saint Mark," every line of which should be noted by the reader:

> Upon a Sabbath day it fell;
> Twice holy was the Sabbath bell
> That called the folk to evening prayer;
> Twice holy was the Sabbath bell;
> The silent streets were crowded well
> With staid and pious companies,
> Warm from their fireside orat'ries;

And moving with demurest air
To evensong and vesper prayer,
Each archèd porch and entry low
Was filled with patient folk and slow,
With whispers hush and shuffling feet,
While played the organ loud and sweet
The bells had ceased, the prayers begun,
And Bertha had not yet half done
A curious volume, patched and torn,
That all day long, from earliest morn,
Had taken captive her two eyes,
Among its golden 'broideries.

This is poetry in its essence and its lyric form, suffused and sanctified by a chasteness of spirit thoroughly in sympathy with the holy theme of the song, and confirming the statement that poetry was with Keats a "philosophy and religion"—a philosophy of life and a religion of the heart. "Beauty is truth, and truth is beauty," was the guiding principle of which he was never forgetful.

It was in the light of such high ideals as these that he was so attracted to Spenser and Milton, the last of whom he calls "old scholar of the spheres." His fondness for Chaucer is based on the fact that the old English poet, with all his faults, was out-and-out sincere, and aimed to enhance in his verse the cause of truth and right; while the great dramatist of the Elizabethan age he calls "that warm-hearted Shakespeare."

In fine, his nature was pure and broad and delicately organized; his sensibilities acute and profound; his vision of truth clear and unbiased, and it was his aim as a lyrist to make the world better

and braver by what he had to sing, the text of all his verse being substantially given us in the first line of "Endymion:"

> A thing of beauty is a joy forever.

Nor is it ever to be forgotten that Keats, with all his personal and literary trials, was a wholesome and hopeful lyrist, coming, at this point, into sharp and favorable contrast with Shelley and Byron and the reigning school of doubt and despair. Few poets have had severer struggles to wage or sharper sorrows to bear, as he feelingly writes in "Endymion:"

> Pleasure is oft a visitant; but pain
> Clings cruelly to us, like the gnawing sloth
> On the deer's tender haunches . . .
> How sickening, how dark the dreadful leisure
> Of weary days, made deeper exquisite
> By a foreknowledge of unslumbrous night!

Despite the malicious onslaughts of the critics, perhaps his bitterest anguish was due to impaired health and the clear indication of shortened life ere he could fulfill his chosen ideals. His lyrics, and especially his sonnets, are full of this plaintive foreboding, and yet there is nowhere to be found that Byronic misanthropy which cast its darkening shadows over much of the literature of the time. Keats could not have written "Don Juan," or even Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," or Shelley's wild and godless "Queen Mab," nor did he ever settle down to a dull and sullen fatalism under the burden of trials that he must perforce endure.

Hence it may be said that his lyrics are meditative without being mournful or morose or made the medium of bitter declaration against God and man and the moral order of the world. There is an element of sadness in them, but not of cynicism or rebellion of heart; just enough of the plaintive and pitiful to make them tenderly impressive and awaken in the heart of every appreciative reader a quick response of personal sympathy. On his tombstone over his grave outside the wall of Rome we read the epitaph that he himself prepared, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water," in commenting on which Professor Saintsbury beautifully adds, "Posterity has agreed with him that it was 'written in water,' but in the water of life." He was of too fine a mold and too pure in heart and purpose to be a pessimistic poet or in any way contribute to the fleshly literature of his century. Admiring Byron as he did early in life, it is not strange that later years clarified his vision and he felt more at home with the contemplative and pure-minded Wordsworth. In no poem does Shelley appear to better advantage than in his elegy on Keats, his "Adonais," in which he pays unbounded tribute to his character and work, and seems fully to appreciate the high ministry he rendered to the English poetry of his day. English literature has been singularly fortunate in that, from time to time in its history, such singers have been raised up just when their services were most urgently needed.

The clearest lesson from the life and work of Keats, after all, is that a poet's place and fame do not depend so much upon just how much he wrote or what he did or how long he lived as upon the essential spirit of his literary product, and as to whether or not it had in it, much or little, the principle and potency of life. At this point Keats may be tested and be seen to abide the test. He was essentially a poet and a lyrist, glorying in his vocation and sacrificing health and leisure and life to its high behests, intent only on lifting the poetic thought of the day to clearer and wider outlook, to the vision of truth and God, and thus he muses and writes:

> O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
> Myself in poesy ! so I may do the deed
> That my own soul has to itself decreed . . .
> Yet there ever rolls
> A vast idea before me, and I gleam
> Therefrom my liberty ; thence, too, I've seen
> The end and aim of poesy.

That "end and aim" were the discovery and revelation of the best things. The death of Keats at twenty-six, in the midst of all these high ambitions and unfinished plans, forms one of the saddest pages in English poetry.

CHAPTER VIII

The Lyrics of Robert Browning

ONE of the first features discernible by any careful student of Mr. Browning as a poet is his marked individuality. He is as unique in British verse as Carlyle is in prose, or Matthew Arnold in literary criticism. There is no antecedent or contemporary English poet that even approximately reminds us of him; not Milton, nor Pope, nor Morris, nor Tennyson. The one who most strongly influenced him was his wife, and yet no two British authors were more unlike. His character and his poetic aims were entirely his own, independent of any authority or precedent or existing standard, confirming the general statement of a recent critic, "that in our approach to the poetry we necessarily approach the personality of the poet." It is on this basis that Browning must be judged, and insists on being judged, and herein we find one of the factors explanatory of his commanding presence in the development of modern English letters.

In dealing with the subject of meditative lyrics the question of special interest now before us is, just how and to what extent Mr. Browning, as a poet, may be justly said to have exhibited this particular type; what the elements of his merit and art were which would naturally have expressed themselves along this specific line. One of these

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elements we find in his intellectuality, the most prominent feature, perhaps, of his poetic work, being in British verse in this respect what George Eliot is in British prose fiction. He maintained that poetry was, first of all, the expression of ideas, the finest and fullest outcome of a man's mental personality. Not that he held, with Carlyle, "poetry is nothing but higher knowledge," but that such "higher knowledge" was an essential factor in it. As he himself expresses it, "The poet's function is that of beholding with an understanding keenness the universe, nature, and man." Poetry, in fine, must be intelligent, sensible, the product of thinking, and not the idle daydream of an empty mind.

At this point the poetry of Browning, on its intellectual side, divides itself into two distinct classes. The one is that portion of his verse, and the larger portion, in which the intellectual feature, as such, is the controlling one, dominating his imagination, feeling, and taste, and demanding thus, on the reader's part, a high order of mind to understand and appreciate it. It is thus that his greatest poem, "The Ring and the Book," has rightly been said to be "the product of sheer intellect." It is abstract, acute, and philosophic. Hence we may, in such poems, say of him, as Brutus said of Cassius, "He thinks too much;" too much, indeed, for the primary purposes of verse, so that the final end of poetry, the æsthetic one, is made subservient to other and less important ends. When it is said

that Mr. Browning "speaks the word of poetry for a scientific age" enough is said to indicate the fact that to the degree in which he succeeded in meeting the demands of such a standard to that degree he failed in realizing the essential ends of verse. Thus it is that in such a poem as "The Inn Album," and in "Paracelsus," "Colombe's Birthday," and other dramas, as well as in some of the shorter products of his pen, he often passes over the border line from the clear thinker to the abstruse and speculative reasoner, and writes an order of verse midway between prose and poetry, with the didactic element as the prominent one.

But there is another side to Mr. Browning's work as intellectual, and bearing directly upon the purpose before us. It is seen in the thoughtfulness of his verse, a form of intellectuality quite distinct from the philosophic and speculative. It is more psychologic than philosophic, a deep and quiet brooding over the great problems of the world, if so be he may approximately solve them for himself and others. In such a mental process faith is more important than mere reason, and, for the time being, the primary instincts of the soul assert themselves over all the formulæ and methods of the schools. One of the most impressive forms which such a thoughtfulness assumes in Browning is seen in his mental sobriety, amounting with him to a kind of religion, in full consonance with the profound gravity of his nature and with his exalted

ideals of the mission of the poet. As a recent critic expresses it, "A philosopher, dealing with abstract ideas, appeals solely to intellect, but Browning is above everything a poet, ascribing the deepest thrill of his inspiration to a religion which represents the vitalizing and personal element in philosophy." Hence how little is there found in Browning of the trivial and the frivolous! How little is there in his dramas on the side of comedy! With what a Senecan sedateness he thinks and composes! Though, in his earlier years, attracted to Lord Byron, how soon was he freed from the enchantment, as he protested against his prevailing methods!

These are precisely the elements that made him a mystic, conning over the facts of life from the standpoint of a religionist, a philosopher, indeed, but a moral philosopher, as deeply absorbed as a man could be in the where and the whither, the why and the what, and the how—a great theistic psychologist. Just here we reach and touch the source of Browning's meditative nature and verse, as found in his thoughtfulness and sobriety, and if to this we add the element of feeling, we reach the source of his lyric nature and verse. Such an element is more and more apparent as we surrender ourselves to the inner meaning and spirit of his poetry. Thus, as we are told, does he "enter the soul by the double gateway of the intellect and feelings," evincing a kind of mental emotiveness,

which reveals him to be, as has been said, "more of a dynamic than a didactic force." At this point inspiration is more prominent as an end than mere instruction, and we see at once the widening distance that separates such a quickening poet as Browning from such didactic versifiers as Pope and Dryden. The emotional or lyric element in Browning now takes the form of a deep, subterranean current, all the more potent because profound—a great Gulf Stream of poetic feeling, warming and vivifying all that it touches. What we may call the stimulus of Browning's verse is partly mental and partly emotional, and to the degree in which it is emotional it is lyric in its type, an expression of that "spiritual ebb and flow" so discernible in the movement of his best productions, the close combination of the lyric and dramatic being one of the evidences of his essential emotiveness. A more thorough and appreciative study of Browning's poetry confirms the fact that this great poet had a heart as well as a brain; that he was "an asserter of the soul in song," and had a message addressed to the sympathies and feelings of men as well as to their rational judgments.

If we now inquire as to the precise amount and character of this lyric element on the meditative side, we shall find it to be far more important than common criticism has generally allowed. If we follow the order of the Cambridge edition of his poems, we note several larger or smaller lyric collec-

tions, each of them marked, more or less, by the presence of the reflective feature. Such are:

Dramatic Lyrics, including such meditative poems as "The Lost Leader," "The Confessional," "Evelyn Hope," "By the Fireside," "Life in a Love," "In a Year," "The Guardian Angel," and "Cristina," the most beautiful, perhaps, of the collection. Of its eight stanzas, one is especially striking, as it reads:

> O, we're sunk enough here God knows!
> But not quite so sunk that moments,
> Sure tho' seldom, are denied us.
> When the spirit's true endowments
> Stand out plainly from its false ones,
> And apprise it of pursuing
> Or the right way or the wrong way,
> To its triumph or undoing.

Then follows the collection Dramatic Romances, including such titles of contemplative order as "The Boy and the Angel," "The Last Ride Together," "Holy-Cross Day," and "The Statue and the Bust," the first of these opening with the pleasing couplets:

> Morning, evening, noon, and night,
> "Praise God!" sang Theocrite.
>
> Then to his poor trade turned,
> Whereby the daily meal was earned.
>
> Hard he labored, long and well;
> O'er his works the boy's curls fell.
>
> But ever, at each period,
> He stopped and sang "Praise God!"

The series of poems under the general title Men and Women then follows, of which the poem entitled "Johannes Agricola in Meditation" is one of the choicest, as it opens:

> There's heaven above and night by night
> I look right through its gorgeous roof;
> No suns and moons though e'er so bright
> Avail to stop me; splendour-proof
> I keep the broods of stars aloof;
> For I intend to get to God.
> For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
> For in God's breast, my own abode,
> These shoals of dazzling glory, passed,
> I lay my spirit down at last,
> I lie where I have always lain,
> God smiles as he has always smiled;
> Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
> Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
> The heavens, God thought on me his child;
> Ordained a life for me, arrayed
> Its circumstances every one
> To the minutest.

These lines read as if from the pen of Pascal or some mediæval mystic, and would of themselves justify for Browning the appellation of a Christian theist. The doctrine of divine foreordination could scarcely be stated more strongly by the most pronounced disciple of Calvin. Following this collection, we note *Dramatis Personæ*, in which are some of Browning's richest reflective lyrics, as "The Worst of It," one of its nineteen stanzas reading:

> Far better commit a fault and have done—
> As you, dear!—forever; and choose the pure,
> And look where the healing waters run,

And strive and strain to be good again,
And a place in the other world ensure,
All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

So, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," with its stimulating strains:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made,
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid."

Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!
Strive and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

The heart of Browning's theory of life lies in such lines as these, in which he insists that struggle, discipline, disappointment, and occasional defeat are an essential part of the divine order, but that victory will come at last, and, if not here, then hereafter:

What I aspire to be,
And was not, comforts me.

In the same collection are the fine lyrics, "Abt Vogler," "Too Late," "Prospice," written just after Mrs. Browning's death, and "Apparent Failure," closing with the expressive teaching:

It's wiser being good than bad;
It's safer being meek than fierce;
It's fitter being sane than mad,
My own hope is, a sun will pierce

The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after Last, returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best can't end worst,
Nor what God blest once prove accurst.

Other lyric collections still follow, such as "Pachiarotto," with Other Poems. "Dramatic Idylls," "Ferishtah's Fancies," and his last production, "Asolando: Fancies and Facts," with its characteristic summons to hope and courage and conflict, as we read in the "Epilogue:"

One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, tho' right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

This is what Mr. Berdoe would call Browning's "Message to his Time," a message of faith and hope and patient endurance, tersely embodied in one of the songs of "Pippa Passes:"

God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world.

One of the great charms of Browning's verse is that "there is no record in it of a personally skeptical stage," no semblance of the prevailing pessimism of the time. As he reflects on God and the soul and the life beyond he insists that these, after all, are the fundamental facts of all history, on which all other truths rest, and by which the earthly life is enriched and glorified. Nowhere are

these beliefs more fully stated and enforced than in his meditative lyrics, where, for all time, the purely intellectual element of his verse is in abeyance, and the soul is given free range in its yearnings after light and certainty and God. Browning had his own way, as Emerson had, of expressing his deepest religious sentiments and beliefs, but that he held them firmly and did express them cannot for a moment be questioned. In fact, had he employed throughout a simpler English diction, and, in his dramas and narrative verse, been as intelligible and sympathetic as in his lyrics, his poetic power would have been immeasurably increased. As it is, however, he is one of the great Victorian masters of song, and of lyric song, and never more inspiring than when musing on the great themes of the soul—"the one poet," as Dr. Furnivall states it, "needing earnest study, and the one most worthy of it." With all his faults and limitations, we feel, as we read him, and to the degree in which we understand and appreciate him, that he is a tremendous ethic force in the heart of modern English letters, a great meditator on man and God. To those who fail to appreciate his message he writes with characteristic candor, as he once wrote to a neglectful British public:

> God love you, whom I have labored for.

CHAPTER IX

The Lyrics of Mrs. Browning

AS in American verse, so in British, and, indeed, in the literature of every people, the lyric form of poetic expression is the one in which the poetess as such reveals her soul and art most naturally. It is here, in the sphere of sentiment and personal experience and subjective conditions, that she feels thoroughly at home, and nowhere more at home than in that special type of lyric we are considering —the meditative. There is something in its subdued, reserved, and delicate nature, as the lyric of love and faith and joy and sorrow and inward peace and struggle and hope that coordinates it well with all the amenities and gentle expressions of human life. Though not necessarily or even historically characterized by any special degree of intellectual strength, it has in marked degree that "sweetness and light" of which Swift and Arnold speak, and often carries its message thereby more effectively to the human heart. As Stedman states it, "The voices of the female poets, if not the best trained, certainly are as natural and independent as any."

Great poetesses are rare in any literature, but, in a sense, on that account are all the more appreciated, while what is called good, average poetic talent in the authoress seems to have an influence quite be-

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yond its essential mental or literary merit, and gives to a nation's developing poetic product just the beauty and grace and sensitive charm that it needs. Naturally such a form of verse in British letters came to its best embodiment somewhat late in the nation's history, not before the opening of the present century, and most especially in the Victorian era. With these names the student of English verse is more or less familiar, such as Letitia Barbauld, Joanna Baillie, Felicia Hemans, in her "Songs of the Affections" and "Lays of Many Lands;" the sisters Brontë, Charlotte and Emily; Miss Elliott, whom Stedman styles "that pure and inspired sibyl;" Miss Procter, Miss Mitford, Miss Swanwick, and others, who, quite apart from any verse of special merit, belong to that "general choir" whose voice must be heeded, and whose notes go to make up the full harmony of English lyric. Two or three names of exceptional note, however, are found in this miscellaneous list. One is that of George Eliot, who, though achieving her special fame in the sphere of fiction and philosophy, has yet, in "The Legend of Jubal," "Agatha," and "The Spanish Gypsy," produced an order of poetic work that the student of British letters must examine for himself. Though not essentially a lyrist, there are in "The Spanish Gypsy" lyric passages of undoubted merit; sufficient, indeed, to evince genuine idyllic merit. The beautiful reflective lyric beginning:

O! may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again,
In minds made better by their presence,

is enough in itself to entitle her to lyric taste. Such selections, also, as "Arion," "Two Lovers," "A Minor Prophet," and "The Death of Moses" are possessed of a distinctively lyric excellence on the more serious side of verse. Another name of merit is that of Jean Ingelow, born far back toward the opening of the century. Few British lyrics sound a sadder and yet a sweeter note than "The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire," with its weird and moving pathos:

I shall never hear her more
By the reedy Lindis shore
Cusha! Cusha! Cusha! calling
Ere the early dews be falling;
I shall never hear her song,
Cusha! Cusha! all along
Where the sunny Lindis floweth,
Goeth, floweth;
From the meads where melick groweth,
When the water winding down
Onward floweth to the town.

The lyric is in reality a dirge, and reads like Kingsley's "The Sands of Dee," or one of Mrs. Browning's passionate pleas for mercy on the wretched. So "The Long White Seam," "Winstanley," and in her beautiful "Songs of Seven," the three closing sections of the serial poem being specifically meditative as she sings of "Widowhood," "Giving in Marriage," and "Longing for Home," while throughout her verse is seen the pres-

ence of a gracious character, ennobling and endearing all that it touches, "evincing that serenity which is poetry's most endearing element."

Born in the same year, 1830, Christina Rossetti has composed some of the choicest idyls of British verse; "a poet," says Stedman, "of profound and serious cast, whose lips part with the breathing of a fervid spirit within," and "when, at last, she beats her music out it has mysterious and soul-felt meaning." What more beautiful in the contemplative line than such selections as "Up-Hill" and "Weary," from the last of which we read:

> I would have gone; God bade me stay.
> I would have worked; God bade me rest.
> He broke my will from day to day.
> He read my yearnings unexpressed,
> And said them nay.

It is, perhaps, the chief distinction of this gifted poetess, in common with Jean Ingelow, that she evinces the same genuine love of the poet's vocation that characterized the greater Mrs. Browning, and aimed with unwearied zeal to further the same great ends of truth and goodness and the well-being of man.

No name in British literature, of poet or poetess, more unmistakably suggests the lyric order of verse, and on the strictly meditative side, than that of Mrs. Browning. As Tennyson represents the artistic and Robert Browning the intellectual side of poetry, Mrs. Browning is the accepted exponent of

the emotional, and always with serious intent. Nurtured as she was in a home of wealth, her nature was, however, thoroughly unselfish, as seen in such poems as "Human Life's Misery," "The Cry of the Children," "A Song for the Ragged Schools of London," and "The Cry of the Human." Suffering for years from physical weakness, and not infrequently from positive bodily pain, and having her full share of the sorrows and crosses of life, it was still her joy to minister to the happiness of others as she sang of "Life and Love," "Comfort," "Calls on the Heart," and "Consolation." Versed as she was in the literature of Greece and in all that pertained to Hellenic culture, her tastes and tendencies and poetic ideals were eminently Hebraic, marked by a devoutness of spirit that hallowed all she penned, and which served to carry the words that she uttered straight to the conscience and the heart of men.

Mrs. Browning's greatest characteristic was character, possessed as she was of that fineness of perception and delicacy of sentiment and fullness of sympathy that belong by right to the womanly nature. As has been said, "With her everything was religion." What she wrote was not only ethically unobjectionable, as cannot always be said of standard authors, but suffused with the very spirit of goodness, clean and chaste and altogether gracious, and fully perceptible to those only whose hearts and lives were in harmony with hers. It

was, indeed, nothing less than spirituality, an unearthly element in all her literary work, by which it was lifted far above the ordinary levels of poetic endeavor.

The very titles of many of her poems—"The Soul Travelling," "A Child's Thought of God," "The Seraph and the Poet," "Finite and Infinite," "Heaven and Earth," "A Sabbath Morning at Sea"—reveal to the reader this specifically spiritual type of the author's mind and work, and demand on his part a corresponding cleanness and loftiness of spirit. In dedicating her poems to her beloved father she speaks of him "as a witness how, if this art of poetry had been a less earnest object to her, it must have fallen from exhausted hands before this day." It was this profound and Hebraic earnestness that stimulated and sustained her, and enabled her, short as her life was, to indelibly impress her salutary teachings on the modern English mind. So marked is this unworldly feature that in her suggestive poem "The Seraph and the Poet" she teaches us that their respective mission in heaven and earth is a common one, and should be so conceived and discharged; and thus she writes:

> Sing, seraph with the glory! Heaven is high;
> Sing, poet with the sorrow! Earth is low;
> The universe's inward voices cry
> "Amen!" to either song of joy or woe;
> Sing, seraph, poet, sing on equally!

In her sublime production "The Vision of Poets" this is the text and central teaching. This is the

meaning of her poem "The Soul's Expression," as she clearly tells us of her aims in verse:

> With stammering lips and insufficient sound
> I strive and struggle to deliver right
> That music of my nature, day and night
> With dream and thought and feeling interwound,
> And only answering all the senses round
> With octaves of a mystic depth and height,
> Which step out grandly to the infinite
> From the dark edges of the sensual ground.

It is this stepping out "to the infinite" which is always visible in Mrs. Browning's verse, this soaring ever higher above "the sensual ground." Moreover, in few poets have thought and feeling worked in richer harmony, possessing, as she did, that order of intellectuality by which truth in the abstract is softened and subdued as it passes out of the mind through the sensibilities. If, as we are told, "the highest mission of a poetess is the expression of love," then Mrs. Browning fulfilled this mission, always, however, in obedience to her mental nature and to her acknowledged office as "the priestess of modern English literature."

Here and there, as in "Aurora Leigh," the mental or didactic quality is unduly prominent, and yet her verse, as a whole, is lyric, and her lyrics, as a whole, meditative, so that one may open the pages almost at random to find examples of that special order of verse that we are studying. When at her best she was emotive and tender, and in all that she wrote she was deeply pondering over the joys

and sorrows, the weal and woe of men. Hence she has not inaptly been called "humanitarian" in her verse, ever intent on the general good. Hence "Aurora Leigh," "The Drama of Exile," "The Seraphim," and "Paraphrases" on the pagan poets apart, we may illustrate the reflective type of her lyrics by a reference to almost any one of them. First in importance, however, would be all those lyrics included under the term sonnets, especially those that are original as distinct from the translated *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, as "Consolation," "Past and Future," "Tears," "Futurity," "The Two Sayings." Thus, the sonnet "Cheerfulness Taught by Reason" opens:

> I think we are too ready with complaint
> In this fair world of God's;

and a similar sonnet, "Exaggeration," closes:

> O brother, let us leave the shame and sin
> Of taking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
> The holy name of Grief! holy herein,
> That by the grief of One came all our good

So, the closing lines of "Adequacy:"

> Maker and High Priest,
> I ask thee not my joys to multiply,
> Only make me worthier of the least.

So, in "Discontent" and "Insufficiency." Thus, in "The Prospect," she pleads in similar strain:

> O man, my brother! hold thy sobbing breath,
> And keep thy soul's large window pure from wrong,
> That so, as life's appointment issueth,
> Thy vision may be clear to watch along
> The sunset consummation—lights of death.

If we turn from the sonnets to the miscellaneous poems, the same lyric thoughtfulness is apparent and prominent, as in "The Poet's Vow," "The Deserted Garden," "The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus," "Cowper's Grave," "A Rhapsody of Life's Progress," with the plaintive refrain:

> O Life! O Beyond!
> Thou art strange, thou art sweet.

Thus, the tender lyric entitled "Victoria's Tears" closes with the impassioned stanza:

> God bless thee, weeping Queen,
> With blessing more divine!
> And fill with happier love than earth's
> That tender heart of thine!
> That when the thrones of earth shall be
> As low as graves brought down,
> A pierced hand may give to thee
> The crown which angels shout to see!
> Thou wilt not weep
> To wear the heavenly crown!

Special mention, also, must be made of her exultant and sublime lyric "A Vision of Poets," in which are some stanzas as fine as any in the English language, in which she pays high tribute to poets in general, and to some special names, as Homer, Pindar, Æschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, Schiller, Chaucer, Milton, Shelley, and others, and closes in triumphant strains:

> Glory to God—to God! he saith—
> Knowledge by suffering endureth,
> And life is perfected by death.

And so on through the volume of her verse, permeated as it is by a deep and tender pathos, taking on at times the form of devout adoration suited to the sanctuary with its ordinances of Christian worship. Indeed, devoutness would best characterize the temper and purpose of Mrs. Browning's lyrics. Never has poet written less for mere literary effect or on merely literary methods. Practical in her poetic aims, even in her most imaginative verse, she was nothing if not sedate and earnest, if so be she might, to some extent at least, realize the philanthropic ideals of her heart. As she states in the opening lines of "Aurora Leigh," she had

> Written much in prose and verse
> For others' uses.

This utilitarian element in her verse was thus simply one of the expressions of her spiritual nature. Hence her aim in such poems as "Garibaldi," "Italy and the World," "Entering Florence," and "Casa Guidi Windows" was strictly practical —to vindicate the right and rebuke the wrong.

No two poems, perhaps, more fully embody this one combination of genuine lyric passion and meditation and practical purpose than those entitled "The Cry of the Human" and "The Cry of the Children:"

> Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brother,
> Ere the sorrow comes with years?

Herein, it may be said, lie the greatest charm and value of Mrs. Browning's verse to the reader, and here is the essential principle of its permanence.

It has so much heart in it that anyone possessed of a sympathetic and responsive nature must yield to it, and yet so much good sense and beneficent purpose in it that everyone interested in the general good must appreciate it. Herein also lie the cardinal features of the meditative lyric—a form of verse in which the heart and the head combine, whereby reflection is mediated to the reader through the agency of feeling, and feeling through the agency of reflection, and the unified result is made doubly rich and potent. One of her sonnets, "Work and Contemplation," would fitly indicate this union of thought and life :

> The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
> A pleasant chant, ballad, or barcarolle;
> She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
> Far more than of the flax; and yet the reel
> Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
> With quick adjustment, provident control,
> The lines, too subtly twisted to unroll,
> Out to a perfect thread; I hence appeal
> To the dear Christian Church—that we may do
> Our Father's business in these temples mirk,
> Thus swift and steadfast; thus intent and strong
> While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
> Some high, calm, spheric tune, and prove our work
> The better for the sweetness of our song.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

CHAPTER X

The Lyrics of Matthew Arnold

THE posthumous publication of Mr. Arnold's "Letters" has served but to deepen the interest already existing in all that he was as a man and did as an author. Revealing, as they do, his most intense personality, his domestic as well as his literary and professional life, they seem to throw light upon what constituted his governing motives, ambitions, and aims, and thus to correct some erroneous impressions hitherto held regarding him.

One of the most important of these pertained to what was supposed to be his unsympathetic nature, and the absence from his individuality of the softer and gentler traits of character. Those who thought they knew him well, in so far as he revealed himself in his writings, are more than surprised to find him, in the immediate circle of his home life and near relationships, a genial, tender, and confidential friend, true to all parental and family obligations, and signally free from haughty isolation and studied reserve of manner. And here, it is in point to say, we may discover the lyric, or emotional, side of Mr. Arnold's life and poetic work, coexisting, as it did, with epic and dramatic instincts, and with a most pronounced ability in the line of literary criticism; while one has but to read a short distance into the volume of his poetry to see

the dominant presence of that meditative element which we are specially discussing, the peculiar type and expression of this reflective feature being so unique as not only to distinguish him from such lyrists as Keats and Wordsworth, but also from such as Byron and Shelley and Clough.

The classification of his poems, given in the edition of 1895, is as follows:

Early poems, including sonnets and other selections.

Narrative poems, such as "Balder Dead."

Sonnets proper, such as "A Picture at Newstead."

Lyric poems, such as "Meeting and Parting."

Elegies, such as "Thyrsis."

Dramatic poems, as "Merope: A Tragedy."

Later poems, as "Kaiser Dead."

The classification, in its seven sections, is clearly reducible, it will be noticed, to the three generally accepted divisions of verse—epic, dramatic, and lyric—while it is to be emphasized that the lyric poems, in one form or another, sonnet, elegy, or lyric proper, constitute at least one half of the entire product of his verse. What we called his early poems and later poems are almost exclusively lyric, while the strictly lyrical element in his narrative and dramatic poems is so large as to naturally modify their structure and final effect. Thus it appears, strange as it may seem, that Matthew Arnold as a poet was primarily a lyric poet of the contemplative type, the expressive lineaments of his face being in

themselves sufficient to show that what he penned he penned after sober thinking, and had no patience with those authors who make of literature a mere profession or avocation, much less with those who treat it superficially and flippantly.

No one would deny that Mr. Arnold was a thoughtful poet, not merely in the sense that he was a poet of thought, of intellectual vigor and power, but in the sense that he was pensive and reflective. He had a kind of Homeric dignity and Senecan sedateness about him that gave increasing weight to all his verse; an epical elevation of manner and movement that was singularly impressive, and challenged the admiration of the reader. In that dramatic sobriety of method and expression which is germane to tragedy he found himself at home, and to this extent his poetic habit was Æschylean and Miltonic. In fine, so pronounced is this deliberative feature that the freedom and flexibility of the verse are somewhat impaired, as, in fact, Mr. Arnold seldom rose to the highest form of lyric song by reason of this Augustan and academic repose of manner. The necessity of feeling in lyric verse he acknowledged, and aimed to illustrate it, holding, with Elliott, that "poetry is impassioned truth;" with Mill, that "it is the influence of our feelings over our thoughts;" and with Byron, "the feeling of past worlds and future;" and yet so strong was this thoughtful element in his personality and work that he often failed to realize his own

poetic ideals, and closely verged upon the borders of didactic verse.

If we now turn to Mr. Arnold's poems for a confirmation of these principles and statements, it is manifest on almost every page. The very first selection, "Quiet Work," is singularly suggestive, followed by such similar poems as "Truth and Calm," "A Memory Picture," "The New Sirens," "Human Life," "Consolation," and "The Second Best," as it opens:

> Moderate tasks and moderate leisure,
> Quiet living, strict-kept measure,
> Both in suffering and in pleasure—
> 'Tis for this thy nature yearns.

It is this "plain living and high thinking, this Wordsworthian equableness of temper and love of quietness and mental peace," that strikes the keynote of most of the verse before us, and reveals the chosen aims of Arnold's life and art. So, "Worldly Place," "Meeting," "Parting," "The Buried Life," "Westminster Abbey," and all his elegiac poems confirm alike this innate and ever-deepening tendency to think and feel and embody in verse these "meditations of the heart."

Hence we note in his verse a distinctive feature in the line of religious speculation, at times assuming the form of theological reflection, as in his prose writings. In fact, the governing type of his mind, as contended by some critics, was best illustrated in the line of doctrinal disputation, as in his "Litera-

ture and Dogma," "God and the Bible," and similar works, so that when he passed from prose to poetry he carried with him the same constitutional bias. Never has there been a more pronounced moralizer in British verse, as he treated no theme or question out of its ethical relations. Never was he more at home and more himself than when contemplating some high subject as to God and the soul and human life and destiny. Thus, the titles of his poems such as "Religious Isolation," "The Better Part," "The Divinity," "Immortality," "Monica's Last Prayer," "Early Death and Fame," "The Youth of Man," and "Mortality," in which he sings:

> With aching hands and bleeding feet
> We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
> We bear the burden and the heat
> Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.
> Not till the hours of light return,
> All we have built, do we discern.

In his specifically memorial poems to Heine, Wordsworth, his revered father, and others, he takes occasion to express his deepest thoughts and feelings on the great problems that confront the soul as it looks within and without and above. Arnold wears upon his face this inquisitive and interrogative look, that of a man who would fain lift the veil that hides the view of heaven, and enjoy the open vision of truth and God. Thus, in his poem "The Future," he longs for this outer and further revelation and envies the happy lot of those who have enjoyed it:

What bard
At the height of his vision can deem
Of God, of the world, of the soul,
With a plainness as near,
As flashing as Moses felt
When he lay in the night by his flock,
On the starlit Arabian waste,
Can rise and obey
The beck of the Spirit like him?

So, in his striking poem "The Buried Life," he sings of the same unceasing and unrewarded quest after truth and light:

But often in the world's most crowded streets,
But often in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us—to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.

This is the unanswered query that ever stands before our poet's mind and will not down—the whence and whither of human life, the origin and destiny of man. From Arnold's later boyhood on to the day of his death he faced this agitating problem, and sought to solve it, and sought in vain, even though the great master of Rugby, his honored father, successfully met and answered it. Inasmuch as in its solution he insisted in exalting the human reason above the demands of faith and spiritual insight, and thus reduced the problem to the level of earth and sense and time, he failed to reach the very

results of certitude and peace for which he was longing. It is this religious and semi-theological speculation that, his strictly educational writings apart, colors all he penned and comes to view in special prominence when he gives free range in verse to the agitations of his soul. Hence it is not strange that we find in his poetry a pervasive element of doubt and despondency, so that the list of his poems properly classifiable under such a category is strikingly large, as "Self-Dependence," "Dover Beach," "Self-Deception," "Despondency," "Resignation," and others, while his epic and dramatic verse reveals the same tinge of sadness of soul. His brief poem "Despondency" is as pitiful as it is brief, as he compares his own disconsolate condition with the more hopeful life of others:

> The thoughts that rain their steady glow
> Like stars on life's wild sea,
> Which others know, or say they know—
> They never shone for me.

In "Dover Beach" he sings in the same despondent strain of a faith once his, but now lost:

> The sea of faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled,
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world....
> for the world which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,

> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain,
> Swept with confused alarm of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Such is "the eternal note of sadness," as he himself calls it, which sounds through all his verse, and which he insists is the dominant note of the various voices of the world. Partly the result of his observation of human life, and partly the truthful expression of his own experience, he seldom allows us to be out of hearing of these canticles of grief and woe over the mysteries of heaven and the miseries of earth.

One of the chief reasons of the prevalence of this minor chord in Arnold's verse is found in the fact that, despite a wise parental guidance and the healthful conditions that surrounded his developing manhood, he never framed for himself and uttered to the world any consistent philosophy of life, any definite code of conduct, nor did he ever stand long enough at the right point of view of human history and belief to form a safe and satisfactory theory of life. Taking exception, as he did, to Mr. Emerson as a thinker and a man because he failed to formulate any specific system of belief and action, he himself failed therein, and even more signally, and thus found himself, as life developed, ever more and more perplexed over the unceasing mystery of the world above him and the world within him, of

being and doing. Thus, in his poem "A Question," he writes:

> Dreams dawn and fly, friends smile and die,
> Like spring flowers;
> Our vaunted life is one long funeral.
> Men dig graves with bitter tears
> For their dead hopes, and all,
> Mazed with doubts and sick with fears,
> Count the hours.

Such sentiments are more than despondent. They are funereal and pitiably hopeless, closing the door, perforce, to all that is bright and good. Hence Mr. Arnold, as a poet, brings to the world no message of certitude and courage and good cheer, and these are just what the world most needs and knows it needs. A lyrist of no inferior order from a purely poetic point of view, meditating day and night on the high themes of God and man, and making the apparent attempt at least to reach some stable status of faith and life, he insists on making the fact of his failure the burden of his song—and a burden, indeed, it is to author and reader, greater than either can bear; while, as we read, we wonder whether this despairing minstrel can be the son of the great-hearted Thomas Arnold, the essential embodiment of faith and manly courage.

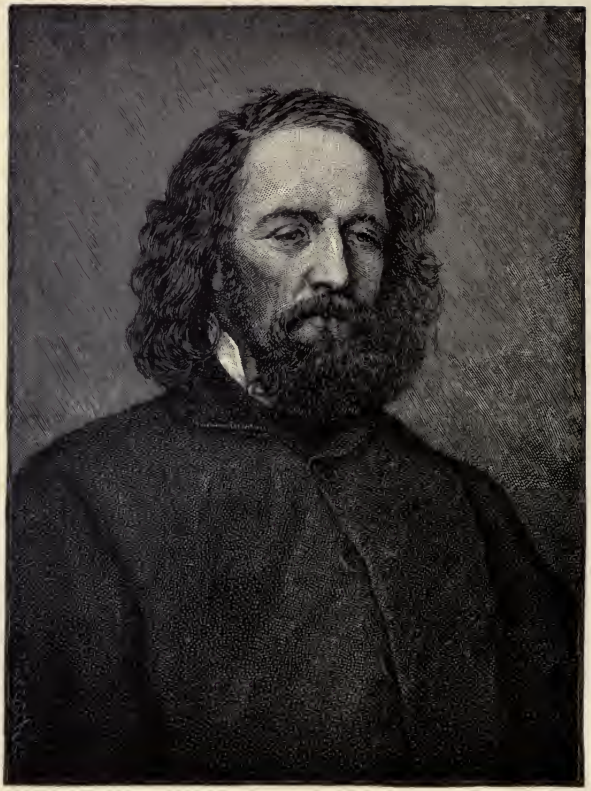
Mr. Arnold is a meditative lyrist, but on the nether side of life—the Edgar Allen Poe of British letters—reminding us of Byron and Shelley and Clough, and kindred spirits, as distinct from Milton and Wordsworth and Mrs. Browning, and all those

idylists who have come to their fellows with a word of good cheer, and left them the braver and better for their singing. How mournful his answer to what is meant by "Growing Old:"

> It is to spend long days
> And not once feel that we were ever young;
> It is to add, immured
> In the hot prison of the present, month
> To month with weary pain.
>
> It is to suffer this,
> And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel;
> Deep in our hidden heart
> Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
> But no emotion—none!

"No emotion," no word of impulse, stimulus, and quickening of spirit do we find in these and kindred lines, but a sad, sullen, and almost stoical message to those who are holding their ears close to the lyre to hear a note of assurance.

It is well for British letters and the modern world that these lyrists of the lower notes are conspicuous by contrast—the great volume of our native song being characterized, as it is, by faith in God and faith in man and the final triumph of the truth. It is of the meditative poets such as Arnold that Stedman is writing, as he says that "they lack that elasticity which is imparted by a true lyrical period—whose very life is gladness. Their uppermost emotion is one of doubt and indecision, a feeling that they were born too late"—a feeling of regret, we may add, that they were born at all.



ALFRED TENNYSON

CHAPTER XI

The Lyrics of Lord Tennyson

MR. LE GALLIENNE, in recently reviewing Victorian literature, states that "we should miss a point of the most characteristic significance were we to miss its essentially religious seriousness;" and he adds, "More and more has 'Il Penseroso' become the muse of modern literature." This is tantamount to saying that Victorian and modern letters have become more and more meditative, while, as a matter of historical fact, such a type of thought and art has been mainly expressed of late through the medium of the lyric. But little noteworthy work has been done in the Victorian era either along the epic or dramatic lines; little that is epic in the Miltonic sense, or dramatic in the Shakespearean sense.—"The Ring and the Book" and "The Idylls of the King" being the most notable examples of epico-dramatic excellence. To this manifest poetic feature and tendency the late poet laureate is no exception, inasmuch as his best effort has been along lyric lines, in one or another of its manifold forms, in ode and sonnet and pastoral and elegy.

Whatever he has accomplished of worth within the sphere of narrative or histrionic verse, he has given to the world something better in the province of the idyllic, within which area, indeed, his

literary gifts have been more pronounced, and where he has succeeded in coming into closer contact with the innermost heart of the English people. Hence in such classifications or collections as his *Juvenilia*, *Sonnets*, *Earlier and Later; The Lady of Shalott*, *and Other Poems*, *English Idylls*, *and Other Poems*, *Tiresias*, *and Other Poems*, *Ballads*, *and other Poems*, *Demeter*, *and Other Poems*, the lyrical element is almost the exclusive one, while in his specifically narrative, dramatic, and semi-dramatic verse the lyric feature is by no means concealed.

If we have in mind such a division as that suggested by Van Dyke, "Melodies and Pictures, Studies and Portraits, Epics, Dramas, Patriotic and Personal Poems, and Poems of the Inner Life," it will be noticed that four of the six sections are characteristically lyric; the last one, "Poems of the Inner Life," being the most decidedly so, and chiefly, on the reflective side, dealing with "life, love, death, doubt, and faith." Hence there is a valid sense in which the name applied to Tennyson's first collection of 1830, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical*, might be applied to his poetry as a whole. If, moreover, we inquire as to the limited or larger presence in this Tennysonian lyric of the special element we are studying—the meditative—we find the answer equally undoubted and impressive, the greater part of it, in truth, being of this specific order. Nor is it meant by this that as meditative it

is so in the same sense and to the same degree as is found to be true in other British bards. The contemplative type of a man or of a poet is unique, indicative of his own way of looking at the world of outward and inward phenomena; one thing in Milton, and one in Wordsworth, and one in Mrs. Browning, and one in Tennyson, and one in Matthew Arnold; modified in each case by character and mental habit, and by the individual author's attitude toward the questions that confront him. In no English author, however, is such a poetic habit more normal and wholesome than in Tennyson, singularly free from the extreme emotionalism of such a lyrist as Mrs. Browning, as also free from the morbid unrest and despondency of a Byron or an Arnold. Not that Tennyson is without his lyrical defects and errors, within the province of the reflective, but that they are so exceptional as in no sense to strike the keynote or set the dominant form of his verse.

Thus, while in such a poem as "The Higher Pantheism" he seems at times to eliminate all distinction between God and the world, and in such a poem as "In Memoriam" seems at times to cross over the border line from faith to doubt and actual denial, each departure from established belief is found to be but incidental and temporary, while the substantive teaching of his poems is clearly in the direction of fundamental truth, so that we cannot think of him as penning such a poem as "Dover

Beach," or writing in the hopeless tenor of Byron and Shelley and the sensual school.

There is such a thing as "intellectual seriousness," a healthy and healthful sobriety of mind and purpose, midway between the asceticism of the hermit-poet and the ungoverned freedom of the literary libertine, and this golden mean Tennyson reached and maintained. What critic has ever been so bold as to accuse him of Puritanic bigotry or of Cavalier frivolity? As sedate and self-poised as a stoic, he escaped alike the narrowness and the looseness of the school of Cato, and revealed to the England of his day that masterful verse might be reserved without being repellant, and interesting without being immoral. As he writes in his poem "The Poet's Mind:"

> Vex not thou the poet's mind
> With thy shallow wit;
> Vex not thou the poet's mind,
> For thou canst not fathom it.
> Clear and bright it should be ever,
> Flowing like a crystal river;
> Bright as light, and clear as wind.

From the composition of "Claribel" to "Crossing the Bar" this master of song kept his mind and heart "clear and bright," bringing to men a message of hope and ever summoning them to higher things. Hence it is that "In Memoriam," his great elegy, and his greatest lyric, if not, indeed, his greatest poem, fitly stands in time and character just midway in his brilliant career as a poet, as if to mark

the maximum of his poetic work, and the high seriousness that pervades it. Equally fitting is the fact that in the year of the publication of this great meditative lyric, 1850, Tennyson came, by right of merit, to the succession of the English laureateship, significantly following the poet Wordsworth, a lyrist of the same high type of thought and feeling. Worthy of emphasis, also, is the fact that in the large number of lyrics written before the middle of the century, and some of them classified as "Juvenilia," there is discernible this introspective habit of mind, though not, of course, in such mature and ripened form as in the closing decades of his long and notable career.

To cite the titles of Tennyson's contemplative lyrics, as distinct from those of a lighter, more secular, and freer order, would take us through the collected content of his verse, not to speak of the vain attempt to make selections of any length from any considerable number of them. It is just here when the literary student sits down to survey this verse from this particular point of view that he is impressed as never before with the fact of its lyric wealth and the fact of its deep and controlling introspectiveness.

Some of these titles declare their own character, as "Nothing Will Die," "All Things Will Die," "The Deserted House," "The Dying Swan," "A Dirge," "Love and Death," "The Death of the Old Year," "On a Mourner," "The Vision of Sin," "De

Profundis," "Despair," "The Dead Prophet," "Vastness," "Forlorn," "The Death of Oenone," "Doubt and Prayer," "The Silent Voices," "Crossing the Bar," and those numerous odes, tributes, and sonnets whose opening lines give us the key to the burden and the song that follows.

Here is a list of poems not only lyric and contemplative, but positively commemorative and plaintive, some of them striking a clear minor note of tender sympathy and mournful regret over the flight of time, the loss of opportunity, the sudden frustration of cherished plans; in fine, over the sorrows and disappointments of human life—a kind of series of elegiac idyls. Thus, in his poem "Vastness," he sings with sighing:

Many a hearth upon our dark globe sighs after many a vanished face,
Many a planet by many a sun may roll with the dust of a vanished race.

Stately purpose, valour in battle, glorious annals of army and fleet,
Death for the right cause, death for the wrong cause, trumpets of victory, groans of defeat.

So, in his graphic poem "The Vision of Sin," in which are pictured the desolations of evil and the wild sensualism of the children of lust, as the rider over the withered heath halts at the inn and sings his ribald lines:

Fill the cup, and fill the can!
  Have a rouse before the morn!
Every moment dies a man,
  Every moment one is born.

Drink to Fortune, drink to Chance,
While we keep a little breath!
Drink to heavy Ignorance!
Hob-and-nob with brother Death!

The poem reads as if penned amid the bestial excesses of the Restoration rather than in the first half of the nineteenth century, while we read between the lines the poet's lamentation over such a revelation of the sin of the human heart. It is a kind of a dirge chanted at the grave of character, the grief of virtue over the shameless boldness of evil.

If we turn, however, from the elegiac type of lyric to those in which the poet's meditations assume a more cheerful and hopeful phase, we shall find a still larger list than before, and, indeed, shall find most of those lyrics that may be said to express his heart's deepest convictions and longings and establish most fully the permanence of his fame.

Such are "The Two Voices," "The Palace of Art," "The Lotos-Eaters," with its beautiful choric song; "Love and Duty," "Faith," "Rizpah," "God and the Universe," "Saint Agnes' Eve," and scores of others with varying degrees of poetic merit, all, however, expressive of the author's deep and quiet musings on the life here and hereafter and man's relation to each of them, while in "The Idylls of the King," in such portions of it especially as "The Holy Grail" and "The Passing of Arthur," this lyric

pensiveness reaches some of its tenderest and most impressive forms.

In "The Ancient Sage" how imposingly the poet summons us out of our baser selves and surroundings to all that is noblest and best in thought and action:

> Wherefore thus be wise,
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt;
> And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!
> She reels not in the storm of warring words,
> She brightens at the clash of "Yes" and "No,"
> She sees the best that glimmers through the worst,
> She feels the sun is hid but for a night,
> She spies the summer thro' the winter's bud,
> She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
> She hears the lark within the songless egg,
> She finds the fountain where they wailed, "Mirage."

What a profound philosophy he teaches as to the possible explanation of most of the trials of man:

> My son, the world is dark with griefs and graves,
> So dark that men cry out against the heavens.
> Who knows but that the darkness is in man?
> The doors of night may be the gates of light.

Such is the clear and comforting note that sounds out to the world from Tennyson's broad and responsive nature, bidding us betake ourselves from thoughts of doubt and despondency and woeful prophecies of evil, and rise to a higher plane of truth and outlook and to the vision of ultimate victory.

Two or three additional marks of Tennyson's reflective lyrics are worthy of note. One of them is seen in the remarkable manner in which, in such

lyrics, he combines the spiritual and natural, the subjective words of the thoughtful mind and the more objective and practical habit of the man of affairs busy in the work and ways of the world. Such a combination is both an evidence of skill in literary art and of a catholic mind in the observation of the world of sense and spirit. Hence we have such practical lyrics as "Alexander," "Buonaparte," "Poland," "England and America," "Wellington," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Third of February, 1852," "Wages," "In the Children's Hospital," "Columbus," and the two "Locksley Halls," in which he lifts up his voice in passionate protest against the wrongs of society and his own native land, closing with the stirring summons:

> Follow light, and do the right—for man can half control his doom—
> Till you find the deathless angel seated in the vacant tomb.

Pointed and practical as these poems are, there is running through them all a deep, intense vein of serious sentiment, as the poet insists on calling men in all their struggles, ambitions, and defeats to the eternal laws of truth and justice and love and divine Providence. Tennyson was a dreamer, but by no means a daydreamer; making poetry a pleasure, but also a sober mental industry; a man of the world as well, and yet a man of both worlds, teaching us that, after all, earth and heaven are closely next each other, and cannot safely be divorced in the life

of any man. He believed in the "higher pantheism," or, as he writes in "The Human Cry:"

> We feel we are nothing, for all is Thou and in thee;
> We feel we are something—that, also, has come from thee;
> We know we are nothing, but thou wilt help us to be,
> Hallowed be thy name . . . Hallelujah!

Readers of these lyrics must also be impressed in noting how successfully they serve to connect the past and the present, the old and the new, older and younger England and Europe, coordinating thus the different eras in the life of man, being true alike to precedent and history, on the one hand, and, on the other, to all the claims of recent progress and the widening development of thought and life. He had what he calls "the passion of the past," and he had the passion of the present. Thus he sang of "Locksley Hall," and of "Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After." Thus, in "The Idylls of the King," he renewed in Victorian days the memories of the older time of Celtic and British history, as in such poems as "Northern Farmer" and "The Battle of Brunanburh" we see the happy deference to England's earlier days and deeds.

More than this, it was reserved for the genius and insight of Tennyson to strike the note of British lyrical verse on its more serious side for the opening years of the twentieth century, and in so sweet and clear and strong a key that our coming bards will find it difficult not to feel it. As Spenser in the Elizabethan era, and Milton in the age of the Stu-

arts, and Wordsworth in the romantic epoch, so Tennyson calls the English people to faith and hope and earnest effort and utters a word of timely warning against any revival of Byronism as the century opens. "We love Victorian literature," says Le Gallienne, "because it has helped us to live, because it has been the richest in the books that delight and sustain," and this is the order of literature, on the side of verse, of which Tennyson has been the most brilliant recent exponent, and the benignant influence of which will pass over into the newer and broader era.

We have been dwelling in a special way on our poet's meditative lyrics as marking as nothing else does the governing spirit of his thought and life and literary poetic purpose; nor is there any poem of his pen that more beautifully embodies this "ruling passion" of his life than the one that fittingly closes the entire collection of his verse, and which found the occasion of its composition in his contemplation of approaching death, and his vision of that open sea of endless being on which he must speedily enter after crossing the bar:

> Twilight and evening bell,
> And after that the dark!
> And may there be no sadness of farewell
> When I embark;
>
> For tho' from out our bourne of time and place
> The flood may bear me far,
> I hope to see my Pilot face to face
> When I have crost the bar.

CHAPTER XII

English Memorial Lyrics—Elegies

"THE old English lyrical feeling," says Ten Brink, "knows in reality but one art-form, that of the elegy. Painful longing for vanished happiness is its keynote." In fact, old English literature as a whole, in prose and verse, tended to the more serious forms, biographies of saints and national heroes, commentaries on Scripture, and ethical treatises on duty and destiny, life and death, the present world and the world to come. So prominent is this feature that such a partial critic as Taine has sought to magnify it to the extreme of the cheerless and morose, though it may in truth be stated that the authors of the time were sedate and reflective without being, in any sense, morbid and unhealthful. Hence the large number of poems of this contemplative type, such as "The Fates of the Apostles," "The Falsehood of Men," "The Vision of Holyrood," "Elene," "The Legend of Saint Andreas," "Christ," "The Seafarer," and similar selections. In the "Metres of Boethius" there is the same undertone of seriousness. Notably in such poems as "The Lament of Deor" and "The Death of Byrhtnoth" we come to memorial lyrics—elegies proper, in their mournful remembrances of vanished joys and departed friends and heroes. Songs on the death of Edward the Martyr and Edward the

Confessor are similarly elegiac. Later in the history, such examples as "The Course of the World," Hampole's "Pricke of Conscience," "The Ormulum," and the various "moral poems" of the time, so called, illustrate the same reflective manner, though not expressing themselves in specific memorial form. In the poetry of Chaucer, in addition to that contemplative feature found to some extent in common with the earlier verse, we find the distinctive elegiac type, as in "The Book of the Duchess," written in memory of Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt, and a high and loving tribute to her personal character.

Coming down to the Elizabethan age, the beginning of English literature as modern, we note, in connection with the signal dramatic development, a good degree of lyric excellence, and expressed, at times, in commemorative strain. Thus, in Spenser, the notable epic poet of the day, we find such elegies as "Daphnaida," written on the death of Douglas Howard; "Astrophel," called a "Pastoral Elegie," on the death of Sidney, and followed by similar stanzas on the same favorite theme. No elegy, however, of distinctive literary merit had as yet appeared, and it remained for Milton, England's first great epic poet, to open what may be called the historical series of English elegies, as now studied by literary critics.

It is interesting to mark that the third poem which we have from Milton's pen, written in 1626,

when seventeen years of age, was to the memory of his sister's child, beginning:

> O fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,
> Soft silken primrose fading timelessly."

In 1630 he penned his famous "Epitaph on Shakespeare:"

> What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones,
> The labor of an age in pilèd stones—
> Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
> What needst thou such weak witness of thy name?
> Thou in our wonder and astonishment
> Hast built thyself a lifelong monument.

By a sudden transition from the sublime to the ordinary, he wrote his tribute to the famous Hobson, the university carrier of Cambridge, and returning as quickly to a sober strain, penned his "Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester."

This brings us to his chief elegy, the monody of "Lycidas," written in 1637, in memory of his beloved and scholarly young friend, Edward King, who was drowned on the passage from Chester to Ireland, tradition telling us that he was kneeling on the deck in prayer as the fated vessel went down:

> For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
> Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.

Referring to their student life at Cambridge, he writes:

> For we were nurst upon the selfsame hill,
> Fed the same flock by fountain, shade, and rill.
> . . . But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
> Now thou art gone, and never must return!

This short elegy, though not in any sense a great lyric poem, is clearly marked by the Miltonic spirit, and is somewhat memorable as containing a few lines that have by frequent citation become familiar to all English readers:

> Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of noble minds),
> To scorn delights and live laborious days.

Also the line:

> Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves.

Also the last line of the monody:

> To-morrow, to fresh woods and pastures new.

Among the sonnets that follow are some of the commemorative order, notably that "On His Deceased Wife," 1658:

> Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
> So clear, as in no face with more delight.

Dryden's "Heroic Stanzas" on Oliver Cromwell followed in 1658–9, an elegy in the form of a eulogy, and written in the fulsome manner of the time. From Alexander Pope we have an "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," somewhat noteworthy as giving rise to Doctor Johnson's accusation that its author defended suicide as a relief from human ills. From Pope, also, we have a series of *Epitaphs*, six in number, and thoroughly characteristic of their author. The one on Newton is often cited:

> Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night;
> God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light.

. Those to Kneller and Gay and Atterbury are of special interest.

From William Cowper we might naturally expect lyric verse of this particular order, his lines "On the Receipt of His Mother's Picture" being memorable:

> O that those lips had language! Life has passed
> With me but roughly since I heard thee last.

The poem is pensive and pathetic throughout, full of the tenderest reminiscences of his childhood and early home, and of pitiful reference to the sorrows he had suffered since her death:

> Me howling blasts drive devious, tempest-tossed,
> Sails ripped, seams opening wide, and compass lost,
> And day by day some current's thwarting force
> Sets me more distant from a prosperous course.

And he adds in grateful remembrance as a child:

> My boast is not that I deduce my birth
> From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth;
> But higher far my proud pretensions rise
> The son of parents passed into the skies.

His poetic versions from the classics also reveal this elegiac feature.

Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," Stoke Pogis, was completed in 1750, and published in 1751, and has become an English classic, nothing superior to it as an elegy preceding it, so that to quote from it is invidious. Its "curfew," "solemn stillness," "ivy-mantled tower," "rugged elms," "incense-breathing

morn," "boast of heraldry," and scores of similar allusions are now a vital part of English poetic reference, and at once suggest their author and time. The marvel that so profound a classical scholar could have written so choice a specimen of impassioned lyric is diminished when it is recalled that Spenser and Milton were his models.

From the pen of Byron we have no inconsiderable amount of elegiac verse, his natural temperament and order of poetry inclining him thereto, many of his poems which are not elegiac proper having decided elegiac features and spirit. The second poem in the first collection of his verse, *The Hours of Idleness*, is an "Epitaph to a Friend." Among his *Fugitive Pieces* is his "Elegy on Newstead Abbey." His "Monody on the Death of Sheridan" and "On Churchill's Grave" are significant examples, the latter closing with the well-known line:

> The glory and the nothing of a name.

In Coleridge and Southey and Burns and Wordsworth we find occasional lines and stanzas of a memorial nature. One of the divisions of Wordsworth's poems is called *Epitaphs and Elegiac Poems*, his great ode, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," being classified therein.

Turning to Shelley, we note one of the accepted standard elegies of English literature—his "Adonais," in memory of the poet Keats. Containing fifty-

five nine-line stanzas of the Spenserian order, it ranks among the more elaborate of English lyrics, and, while not a great poem, has enough passages of merit in it and enough of the genuine impulse of poetry to give it a specific place and character:

Alas! that all we loved of him should be,
But for our own grief, as if it had not been,
And grief itself be mortal! Woe is me!
Whence are we and why are we? of what scene
The actors or spectators? Great and mean
Meet massed in death, who lends what life must borrow,
As long as skies are blue and fields are green,
Evening must usher night, night urge the morrow,
Month follow month with woe, and year wake year to sorrow.

In what are called *Fragments*, consisting of twenty-seven miscellaneous poems, one is found—the twenty-second—in which Shelley once again, in a single stanza, renews his remembrance of Keats.

In Mrs. Browning's beautiful lyrics the elegiac feature has its rightful place, expressing, as it does, so fittingly the ingenuous sympathies of her affectionate nature. Of this order is "Cowper's Grave," in which she takes occasion to make tender reference to what he did for the world even in the midst of personal mental suffering.

So, her poems "On a Portrait of Wordsworth," "Crowned and Buried," a poem on Napoleon; "A Lament for Adonis," "A Child's Grave at Florence," "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans," are strictly elegies; while her poetry is especially marked by selections of a specific elegiac type, though not formally elegies. Such are "Bereave-

ment," "Consolation," "Tears," "Grief," "Comfort," "Victoria's Tears," "The Mourning Mother," "Human Life's Misery," "The Cry of the Human," and "The Cry of the Children," no English poet or poetess having striven more faithfully in verse to alleviate human sorrow and inspire hope and love and cheer in the hearts of the desolate. Mrs. Browning was the natural complement of her gifted husband, and evinced in her life and teachings as complete a mastery of the sympathetic side of human nature as Robert Browning did of the intellectual. In the poem "Too Late" Mr. Browning himself appears in the attitude of an elegist—as in other poems, such as "The Lost Leader," "May and Death," he writes in the elegiac manner.

In the poetry of Matthew Arnold we find choice commemorative verse, as in "Shakespeare," "Requiescat," "Youth and Calm," "Westminster Abbey," a poem on the death of Stanley, Dean of Westminster; "Geist's Grave," "Kaiser Dead," and "Memorial Verses," in which he pays a loving tribute to Wordsworth:

> The last poetic voice is dumb,
> We stand to-day by Wordsworth's tomb.
> Time may restore us in his course
> Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;
> But where will Europe's latter hour
> Again find Wordsworth's healing power?

Also "Haworth Churchyard," "Heine's Grave," and "Rugby Chapel," in which last poem he pays a filial tribute to his father:

O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now? . . .
To us thou wast still
Cheerful and helpful and firm!
Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself,
And through thee I believe
In the noble and great who are gone.

His elegy "Thyrsis," in memory of Arthur Henry Clough, has always been regarded as exceptionally fine, as it opens:

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!

Made up of twenty-four ten-line stanzas, with a pleasing variation of meter, the monody is full of the tenderest personal reminiscences and suffused with the spirit of love and poetic beauty, revealing its author as a man of deep and strong emotive nature:

Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade,
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with gray;
I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train;
The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crushed, less quick to spring again.

So, Tennyson, the last and greatest of our masters in song, has written many poems of the elegiac order, such as "Love and Death," "Morte d' Arthur," and his "Ode on the Death of Wellington;" his "In Memoriam" standing absolutely

alone, as an elegy, in its scope and spirit and poetic excellence—so sustained on its high level of thought and feeling, and so imbued with the best reflections of the century, as to give it epic and dramatic character and to mark it as the great intellectual lyric of the age.

In William Watson's elegy "Lachrymæ Musarum," written in memory of Tennyson, we have a fitting tribute of the younger bard to the older, and a valid promise as well that the high repute of English elegiac verse will be ably sustained by the new singers.

CHAPTER XIII

English Devotional Lyrics—Hymns

OUR purpose in this survey is to note what might be called literary hymns—hymns written by English authors proper who have done notable literary work along secular lines—by such poets as Milton and Pope rather than by such as Watts, Wesley, and Toplady. Old English poetry may be said to open with a hymn, the historic hymn of Cædmon, author of "The Paraphrase," the oldest English epic. The "Hymn" is a tribute to God, the Creator and Lord, and opens with the lines:

> Now shall we glorify the guardian of heaven's kingdom,
> The Creator's might; and the thought of his mind,
> The deeds of the Father of glory.

The famous "Death Song" of the historian Bede, as related by Cuthbert, his loving pupil, is of this same hymnic type and purpose.

The serious-mindedness of our earliest poetry naturally expressed itself in these devotional forms, even though somewhat crudely and provincially.

Beginning at the Elizabethan era, our space will permit us to emphasize only the most striking examples of these hymns of Englishmen of letters, confirming the fact that in England, at least, there may be found what a recent writer has called "the religion of a literary man." The first selections are from the verse of Spenser, the epic poet of the six-

teenth century, who wrote what are known in English verse as his four hymns—"An Hymne in Honour of Love," "An Hymne in Honour of Beautie," "An Hymne of Heavenly Love," and "An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie." The first two, as he tells us, celebrate earthly, or natural, love and beauty, and the last two, heavenly, these last having been written as a kind of apology for the first. "An Hymne of Heavenly Love" is especially beautiful and full of genuine Christian spirit in its reference to Christ and his mediatorial work. It speaks of the fall of the angels, the creation of man, man's fall and redemption through the Saviour:

> And that most blessed bodie, which was borne
> Without all blemish or reproachfull blame,
> He freely gave to be both rent and torne
> Of cruell hands, who with despightfull shame
> Revyling him, that them most vile became,
> At length him nayl̀ed on a gallow-tree,
> And slew the Just by most unjust decree.

Our next great literary hymnologist is Milton, who opened his poetical career with a paraphrase of the 136th Psalm in twenty-four couplets:

> Let us with a gladsome mind
> Praise the Lord, for he is kind.

Each of the couplets adds the refrain:

> For his mercies aye endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure.

Then follows Milton's great poem "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity;" "A poem," says Knightley, "on which we offer no particular criticism, for it

is, in effect, nearly all beauty." Milton thus wrote concerning it to his friend Diodati: "We are engaged in singing the heavenly birth of the King of Peace and the happy age promised by the holy books. This is the gift we have presented to Christ's natal day. On that very morning, at daybreak, it was first conceived." The poem consists of a prologue of four seven-line stanzas, beginning:

> This is the month, and this the happy morn,
> Wherein the Son of heaven's eternal King,
> Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
> Our great redemption from above did bring;
> For so the holy sages once did sing,
> That he our deadly forfeit should release,
> And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

After the prologue, what is called, specifically, "The Hymn" opens, running on through twenty-seven eight-line stanzas, beginning:

> It was the winter wild
> While the heaven-born child
> All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;
> Nature in awe to him
> Had dofft her gaudy trim,
> With her great Master so to sympathize;
> It was no season then for her
> To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

Of the several stanzas perhaps the thirteenth is the most beautiful and characteristic:

> Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
> Once bless our human ears
> (If ye have power to touch our senses so),
> And let your silver chime
> Move in melodious time;
> And let the base of heaven's deep organ blow;

And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full consort to th' angelic symphony.

The hymn throughout is wholly Miltonic, and may be said to set the note for all the later poetry of Milton, which, as a body of verse, is one continuous tribute to the Deity.

Next in order we come to Joseph Addison, poet and essayist of the Augustan age, and the author of several hymns of note, some of which are used in the services of Christian worship. The hymns attributed to him, and found in the *Spectator*, are as follows:

His paraphrase of the Twenty-third Psalm in four stanzas:

The Lord my pasture shall prepare,
And feed me with a shepherd's care;
His presence shall my wants supply,
And guard me with a watchful eye;
My noonday walks he shall attend,
And all my midnight hours defend.

This paraphrase was suggested, as Courthope thinks, by Addison's journeying in the beautiful valley of the Avon. The next hymn opens as follows:

When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,

the six stanzas of our hymnals being but a part of the original thirteen stanzas. In the *Spectator* article, at the close of which the full poem is found, Addison dwells on the virtue of gratitude, and wonders that "more of our Christian poets have not turned their thoughts this way." Then follows

the sublime astronomical hymn, a kind of paraphrase of the opening verses of the 19th Psalm:

> The spacious firmament on high,
> With all the blue ethereal sky,
> And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
> Their great Original proclaim.

This reverent hymn is found at the close of a paper (*Spectator*, 465) in which the author is showing the best means of confirming Christian faith. "One of these," he writes, is "an habitual admiration of the Supreme Being." "The devout man," he adds, "does not only believe but feels there is a Deity," and, in special connection with the hymn, further says, "The Supreme Being has made the best arguments for his own existence in the heavens and the earth."

The next hymn, so familiar to the Church, begins:

> How are thy servants blest, O Lord!
> How sure is their defence!

the five stanzas of our collections being a part of the original ten. The hymn was evidently written in view, through the imagination, of a tempest-tossed ocean, and the dangers incident thereto, and with the 107th Psalm in mind. "Such an object," he says, "as an ocean in a storm convinces me of God's existence as much as a metaphysical demonstration."

The next example is a hymn written, as the author states, in a time of illness, and is a metrical meditation on death:

When, rising from the bed of death,
O'erwhelmed with guilt and fear,
I see my Maker face to face,
O how shall I appear?

In addition to these five hymns Addison wrote other "pieces of divine poetry." One of them is a sacred eclogue paraphrasing portions of Isaiah. Another is a paraphrase of a portion of Solomon's Song, and another still a rendering of the seventh chapter of Proverbs, while it may be added that a full understanding of the work of Addison in behalf of English letters and character cannot be reached by readers and critics without taking into account his devout Christian spirit and the numerous occasions of which he took advantage to express such an order of sentiment in verse and prose.

Turning to the poetry of Pope, we may note that his well-known ode, "The Dying Christian to His Soul,"

Vital spark of heavenly flame!
Quit, O quit this mortal frame!

is substantially a hymn in its spirit and purpose. Pope's "Universal Prayer," as it is called, a paraphrase, in part, of the Lord's Prayer, and written to justify his position as a Christian theist, is his most notable contribution to hymnology. Made up of thirteen quatrains, it is in reality a tribute to Jehovah as Creator and Lord, and is marked throughout by a reverent and tender spirit. It is one of our great theistic hymns. Two or three stanzas may be cited:

Father of all! in every age,
In every clime, adored,
By saint, by savage, and by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!

If I am right, thy grace impart,
Still in the right to stay;
If I am wrong, O teach my heart
To find that better way.

Teach me to feel another's woe,
To hide the fault I see;
That mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.

Coming to the name of William Cowper, we meet with an author who combines, as few English authors have done, the specific religious type of verse with the literary. The *Olney Hymns*, sixty-eight in number, have become a classic collection in modern hymnology, so that the reader may be referred to the series as it stands. They are memorable not simply by reason of their intrinsic poetic merit, but also because of the peculiarly painful circumstances under which many of them were composed. Perhaps the most notable hymn of the list is the one on Divine Providence, the last of the number, and entitled "Light Shining Out of Darkness:"

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.

The author composed it, we are told, "in the twilight of departing reason." The darkness was indeed deeper than that of twilight, as may be gathered from his remarkable statement, "I have never met, either in books or conversation, with an

experience at all similar to mine;" with an experience, he means, so distressing and hopeless; and yet through such songs as these thousands have been comforted.

In addition to the *Olney Hymns* he wrote a few miscellaneous verses of a similar order, while some of his translations, as those from the French of Madame Guyon, are essentially hymnic.

From the pen of Thomas Moore, author of the *Irish Melodies*, we have, strange to say, a collection of "Sacred Songs," thirty-two in number, some of which are exceptionally excellent as hymns. Such are, "Thou Art, O God, the Life and Light," "This World is All a Fleeting Show," "O Thou Who Driest the Mourner's Tear," "The Turf Shall be my Fragrant Shrine," "Sound the Loud Timbrel o'er Egypt's Dark Sea," "Come, ye Disconsolate, Where'er ye Languish."

Many of his odes and miscellaneous poems are veritable hymns, as the lines:

> All that's bright must fade.
>
> Hark! the vesper hymn is stealing
> O'er the water soft and clear.

Even his *Irish Melodies* are not without a devotional element. Few things in English letters are stranger than that such a man, the intimate friend of Byron, should have penned such poems; he had, however, the instincts of a genuine lyric bard, and, in the sphere of secular verse, has written some of the choicest songs of English speech.

So we have Coleridge's famous "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni," and Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," while in such poets as Keats and Wordsworth and Mrs. Browning and Tennyson examples are numerous in which meditative poems border so closely on the line of hymns as to make the difference scarcely discernible. The presence of this devotional element in American literature we have fully discussed elsewhere.*

What Mr. Brookes has called "the theology of the English poets" is thus expressed, from Cædmon to Tennyson, in the form of Christian praise, and serves to give sanctity and moral strength to the expanding volume of our vernacular verse.

* *American Meditative Lyrics.* E. B. Treat & Co., New York.

CONCLUDING CHAPTER

The Larger Lyric List

WE have thus briefly sketched what may be called the historical development of the British reflective lyric from the days of Elizabeth to Victoria, emphasizing the work of Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Mrs. Browning, Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, and Tennyson, as also those special forms of such lyric illustrated in the sphere of elegiac and devotional verse. As stated in the Preface, no attempt has been made to compass the large and inviting list of such representative authors, sufficient names being presented to indicate the general spirit and value of such a line of lyric poetry. Hence the merest reference to such notable names as Coleridge, author of "Christabel," "The Ancient Mariner," and such pensive poems as "Truth and Age" and "The Good, Great Man;" Landor, author of "The Maid's Lament" and the touching lines "To the Sister of Elia;" Burns, in his "Auld Lang Syne," "Honest Poverty," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and the characteristic lines "To Mary in Heaven;" Shelley, in his "Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples," and in such poems as "The Cloud," "Autumn—a Dirge," and "To-Night;" Moore, in his poems, "Hath Sorrow thy Young Days Shaded?"

"Oft in the Stilly Night," "Go Where Glory Waits Thee," "Those Evening Bells," and similar selections of the contemplative order.

If we lay down such a roll of representative poets and take up the still larger roll of minor meditative lyrists, dead and living, whose work, however, has been of substantive value, we notice some of the most familiar and cherished names of British song: Goldsmith, in his "Traveler," "Deserted Village," and "Hermit," so distinctly reflective in their character, and yet so full of tender feeling; Gray, author of the famous "Elegy" and of the "Hymn to Adversity" and "Eton College;" Thomson, author of "The Seasons," with its frequent teachings on the changing phases of human life; Collins, in his "Dirge in Cymbeline" and his odes "How Sleep the Brave," "Ode to Evening," and "The Passions;" Kingsley, in the beautiful lyrics "The Three Fishers" and "The Sands o' Dee;" Shenstone, in his "Schoolmistress" and his "Pastoral Ballad," in its four parts—Absence, Strife, Solitude, and Disappointment; Scott, in his "Paraphrase of Dies Iræ," "Alice Brand," "Rebecca's Hymn," and "Soldier's Rest;" Hood, in "The Bridge of Sighs," "The Deathbed," and "The Song of the Shirt;" Ramsay, author of "The Gentle Shepherd;" Rossetti, author of "The Blessed Damozel," "Parted Love," "Newborn Death," 'The Monochord," and "Ave;" Beattie, author of "The Hermit;" Campbell, in "Hallowed Ground," "The Soldier's Dream,"

"The Exile of Erin," and "The Last Man;" Lamb, in his "Old Familiar Faces;" Southey, in "The Pauper's Deathbed," "Complaints of the Poor," and "The Young Gray Head;" Gerald Massey, in such pensive poems as "At Eventide," "Out of the Depths," "The Light of the World," "A Cry in the Night," and "The Two Heavens," not a little of his verse being of the strictly devotional order; Mitford, Trench, Newman, Beddoes, Dobell, Meredith, MacDonald, Marston, and Buchanan.

Such is an indication of this list of authors, each of whom has made valid contributions to British lyric on the reflective side; and if to these we add such names as Mrs. Hemans, Keble, and Montgomery, whose chosen sphere has been that of poetic meditation on the religious side, the list is still again enlarged, and we see the substantial basis of British verse given it by these sober-minded bards. Among these minor meditative lyrists of some note there is one deserving special study—the Byron of modern British poetry—Arthur Hugh Clough, whose short and troubled life of forty-two years is voiced in some of the most plaintive stanzas of Victorian verse—a poet, says Lowell, "who will be thought a hundred years hence to have been the truest expression in verse of the moral and intellectual tenderness, the doubt and struggle toward settled convictions, of the period in which he lived." It is the active presence of this doubt and struggle, "this impassioned search for reality," that makes

him essentially a contemplative lyrist, so that there is scarcely a poem he wrote that is not marked by it. Thus "Qui Laborat, Orat," beginning in prayer and confession:

> O only Source of all our light and life,
> Whom as our truth, our strength, we see and feel,
> But whom the hours of mortal, moral strife
> Alone aright reveal!
>
> Mine inmost soul, before Thee only brought,
> Thy presence own, ineffable, divine;
> Chastised each rebel, self-encentered thought,
> My will adoreth Thine.

So, in "Hidden Love," "With Whom is No Variableness," and "Perchè Pensa?" opening characteristically:

> To spend uncounted years of pain,
> Again, again, and yet again,
> In working out in heart and brain
> The problem of our being here.

So, in "The Shadow," "Dipsychus," "The Stream of Life," "Where Lies the Land?" and that minor lyric monologue, "Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth." Such collections as *Seven Sonnets on the Thought of Death*, his *Songs in Absence*, *Poems on Religious and Biblical Subjects*, *Poems on Life and Duty*, specifically indicate in their titles their reflective nature; while in his early poems and miscellaneous poems the same serious purpose dominates the lines, as in "The Thread of Truth," "The Music of the World and the Soul," "Parting," "Truth and Age," and "In the Depths." In these and all his poems this high-strung and sympathetic

spirit wrestles with himself and the world if so be he may extort the secret of existence and of destiny—and yet all in vain. The Byron as he is of his time, he evinces, after all, a saner philosophy and a more docile spirit; is more in sympathy with his fellows, and is glad to follow the light when he finds it. If he wrote on "Darkness" and "In the Depths," he also wrote on "Duty," "Hope Evermore and Believe," "All is Well," and "The Higher Courage," and so he sings, in more cheerful strain:

> It fortifies my soul to know
> That, though I perish, Truth is so;
> That, howsoe'er I stray and range,
> Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.
> I steadier step when I recall
> That, if I slip, thou dost not fall.

Some of the more expressive of these lyrics of the soul are from the pens of unknown authors, who have been content to pass their lives and do their duty and pen their poems with no thought of fame, or any other end than the joy of the work itself. Such is the beautiful lyric "Between the Lights," written in the same tender strain of reminiscence as Longfellow's "Children's Hour," and beginning:

> A little pause in life—while daylight lingers
> Between the sunset and the pale moonrise,
> When daily labor slips from weary fingers,
> And calm, gray shadows veil the aching eyes.
>
> Old perfumes wander back from fields of clover,
> Seen in the light of stars that long have set;
> Beloved ones, whose earthly toil is over,
> Draw near as if they lived among us yet.

So, the equally beautiful poems, "The Changed Cross," "Loveliness of Love," "Only Waiting," "Veni Creator Spiritus," and "Twenty Years Ago," all breathing the same contemplative spirit.

If we turn from these earlier and later lyrists to others, such as Lang and Dobson, a simple reference to three or four of the most noted of them must suffice. Most prominent among them is Swinburne, a lyric poet of high order, as seen in his various collections. Such are *Studies in Song*, with such reflective lyrics as "A Parting Song" and "Off Shore;" *Songs before Sunrise*, with such examples as "The Litany of Nations," "Tenebræ," "Mater Dolorosa," and "A Year's Burden;" *Poems and Ballads*, such as "In Time of Mourning" and "Age and Song;" *A Century of Roundels*, as "Past Days" and "Birth and Death"—some of the songs scattered through his dramas being of the highest order, both by way of exquisite artistic form and a tender personal sentiment, the introspective and pensive type of so many of his poems being all the more remarkable from such a poet as Swinburne.

In such examples as "Before a Crucifix," "Hymn of Man," "Genesis," "Pelagius," "In the Bay," "Felise," we note the expression of his semi-pagan and pantheistic views on the great truths of Christianity, his theology being far inferior to his poetry. Thus he wrote in pessimistic and practically atheistic strain:

From too much love of living
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be.
That no life lives forever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the meanest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

No sensitive reader of Swinburne can but reflect as to what the power of his meditative verse might be had he not pandered less directly in his earlier days to the baser passions of men, and did he not in truly Byronic fashion insist on the utterance of sentiments so out of harmony with the accepted beliefs of modern Christendom.

Then follows such a poet as Edwin Arnold, in such of his collections as *Lotus and Jewel*, *Indian Idylls*, and *Pearls of Faith*. Such separate titles as "In Westminster Abbey," "The Heavenly Secret," "God's Name in Heaven," "The Peace of Paradise," "The Last Day," and "The Life Beyond" sufficiently indicate that character of oriental reflectiveness that marks Arnold's shorter and longer poems.

Worthy of special reference is Alfred Austen, the poet laureate, suggestively working, more or less successfully, along the same attractive line of the meditative lyric. His dramas and narrative poems apart, he has given to the public such lyric collections as *Soliloquies in Song*, *At the Gate of the Convent, and Other Poems*, *Interludes*, *Love's Widowhood, and Other Poems*, *English Lyrics*,

and the epico-lyric "England's Darling." From the *Interludes* we note such contemplative lyrics as "At Shelley's Grave," "Let the Weary World Go Round," "If I to You but Sorrow Bring," "Before, Behind, and Beyond," and "By the Fates."

In the collection *Soliloquies in Song* are many such lyrics of exceptional merit, such as "Brother Benedict," "Longing," "A Farmhouse Dirge," with its genuine poetic pathos; "At His Grave," "The Death of Huss," "George Eliot," and the beautiful sonnet "A Sleepless Night," beginning:

> Within the hollow silence of the night
> I lay awake and listened.

In "Celestial Heights" we read:

> Even so, and, poised aloft, my soul
> Far above human fret and dole
> In empyrean calm abides,
> No mortal voice the silence mars;
> I hear the singing of the stars,
> And the eternal tides.

In his tender poem "Off Mesolongi," which might be called a lamentation over the mistaken ideals and unhappy fate of Lord Byron, we have a meditative lyric, every line of which is worthy of quotation, as he speaks of him as one

> Who blindly fought his way from birth,
> Nor learned, till 'twas too late to heed,
> Not all the noblest songs are worth
> One noble deed!
> Who with the doom of glory cursed,
> Still played the athlete's hollow part,
> And 'neath his bay-green temples nursed
> A withered heart."

Equally beautiful is his "Ave Maria," and his tribute given us in "Poet's Corner" of the Abbey is worthy of the pen of Milton or Burns:

> For should there come that threatened day,
> When creeds shall fade, when faith decay,
> And worship shall have ceased,
> Then, when all formal guides shall fail,
> Mankind will in the poet hail
> A prophet and a priest.

This may not be great verse, but it is good verse, and quite above the average, and confirms, at least, the statement of recent criticism as to the poet laureate, that "nothing he has written or is expected to write will ever tend to debase the moral tone or intellectual taste of English-reading people." His recent jubilee verses, "Victoria" and "Victoria, the Good," fully indorse this praise and prophecy.

A single additional lyrist, William Watson, justifies a special comment, rivaling the laureate himself in the strength and richness of his verse and evincing in most of his poetic product the undoubted traits of a reflective lyrist, a sweet and tender minor tone sounding softly through his lines, as indicated in such titles as "World Strangeness," "In Laleham Churchyard," "The Questioners," "Three Eternities," "God-Seeking," "The Great Misgiving," and "The Fugitive Ideal." In his sonnet "Life without Health" we read between the lines something of his own bitter experience. In "Wordsworth's Grave" and in "Lachrymæ Musarum" and "Shelley's Centennary" we find

three of the noblest tributes in British verse to the memory of the departed masters of song. A collection of his poems under the title *Lyric Love* gives us a fitting caption for much of his best verse, so full of genuine poetic merit. Even his political sonnets and epigrams have this idyllic quality on the thoughtful side. No poem he has written more fittingly indicates his governing spirit as a man and a bard than the inspiring one entitled "The Things that are More Excellent:"

As we wax older on this earth,
  Till many a toy that charmed us seems
Emptied of beauty, stripped of worth,
  And mean as dust and dead as dreams,
For goods that perished, shows that passed,
  Some recompense the Fates have sent;
Thrice lovelier shine the things that last,
  The things that are more excellent.

To dress, to call, to drive, to break
  No canon of the social code,
The little laws that lacqueys make,
  The futile decalogue of mode,
How many a soul for these things lives,
  With pious passion, grave intent!
While nature, careless-handed, gives
  The things that are more excellent.

Let the genius of these poets, and such as these, be what it may, English poetry is safe beyond hazard in such hands and hearts, and, perchance, in the absence of any high mastery in the art of epic and dramatic song we may feel a compensation in this wealth of lyric outburst, these devout aspirings of the soul.

Poetry, after all, in its highest conception is a form of devotion, "a vision and a faculty divine," having in it, as Bacon said, "some participation of divineness." As a living American critic states it, "It is the straightest message from the inaccessible human soul;" and he adds, "Some kind of faith has engendered all poetry that is noteworthy for beauty or power."

Poetry is thus, in most of its forms, and especially in the lyric, a veritable communion, a contemplation of God and life and human destiny—a meditation of the heart, deep and silent and potent—an inlook and an uplook, as the soul holds high converse with the ever-widening world of invisible realities.

"Only that is poetry," says Emerson, "which cleanses and mans me;" only that, we may add, which strengthens us and aids us in our search after light and love and truth and God.

As Bailey, in his "Festus," sings:

> Poetry is itself a thing of God;
> He made his prophets poets, and the more
> We feel of poesie, do we become like God
> In love and power.

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